INTRUDERS from the STARS by Ross Rocklynne
See BACK COVER
AMAZING STORIES
JANUARY
The MAD ROBOT
BY WILLIAM P. McGIVERN
VOLUME 18 NUMBER 1
AMAZING STORIES
JANUARY 1944

Are you interested in a SHAVING CREAM

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1st Lieutenant in Signal Corps

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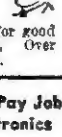
EXTRA PAY IN ARMY, NAVY, TOO



Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the Coupon now! Learning Radio helps Service men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duties, much higher pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. Over 1,700 Service men now enrolled.

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The opportunity the war has given beginners to get started in the fascinating field of Radio may never be repeated. So take the first step at once. Get my FREE Lesson and 64-page, illustrated book. No obligation—no salesman will call. Just mail Coupon in an envelope or paste it on a penny postcard. —J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 3NM, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.

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Mail me FREE, without obligation, your Sample Lesson and 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." (No Salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

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CONTENTS PAGE

AMAZING STORIES

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

JANUARY 1944

» STORIES «

THE MAD ROBOT (Novelet).....by William P. McGivern.. 10
Nick Weston's mission to Jupiter was difficult enough without having to battle with robots!

INTRUDERS FROM THE STARS (Short Novel)....by Ross Rocklynne..... 44
So cruel was Bess-Istra's reign that her own world cast her out. Yet Earth made her welcome!

PHANTOM CITY OF LUNA (Novelet).....by P. F. Costello..... 102
The Astra's goal was Mars. But she went to the moon instead—and at the point of a gun.

MASTER OF THE LIVING DEAD (Novelet).....by Ed Earl Repp..... 130
This modern fountain of youth cost Merl Blair her beauty—and almost cost Steve his sanity!

ISLAND OF ETERNAL STORM (Novelet).....by Berkeley Livingston.... 150
Nothing could live through this area of storm, yet they did live—or wasn't it really life?

THE NEEDLE POINTS TO DEATH (Short).....by Gerald Vance..... 176
Jeff faced a mad killer and his only defense was a mechanism for measuring the cold of space

» FEATURES «

The Observatory..... 6
Vignettes of Famous Scientists..... 43
Protection For War Supplies..... 149
Scientific Oddities..... 184
Scientific Mysteries..... 186
A Scientific Brother-Sister Act..... 189
Meet the Authors..... 190
Discussions..... 191
Stories of the Stars..... 208

Front cover painting by Robert Fuqua, illustrating a scene from "The Mad Robot"
Back cover painting by Robert Fuqua, depicting "Stories Of The Stars—Death Of The Moon."
Illustrations by Robert Fuqua, Magarian, Ronald Clyne, Julian S. Krupa.

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Volume 18 Number 1

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Truths That Have Been Denied Struggling Humanity

FOR every word that has left the lips of bishops or statesmen to enlighten man, a thousand have been withheld. For every book publicly exposed to the inquiring mind, one hundred more have been suppressed—*damned to oblivion*. Each year of progress has been wilfully delayed centuries. Wisdom has had to filter through biased, secret sessions or ecclesiastical council meetings, where high dignitaries of state and church alone proclaimed what man should know.

Are you prepared to demand the hidden facts of life? Will you continue to believe that you are not capable of weighing the worth of knowledge that concerns your personal freedom and happiness? Realize that much that can make your life more *understandable* and *livable* has been left unexplained or intentionally destroyed. At first by word of mouth only, and *now* by private discourses, are *revealed* those truths which secret brotherhoods preserved in ancient temples and hidden sanctuaries, from those who sought to selfishly deprive humanity of them.

THIS *free* BOOK OF EXPLANATION

Let the Rosicrucians, one of these ancient brotherhoods of learning, tell you about these amazing truths, and explain how you, too, like thousands of others, may now use them to enjoy the fullness of life. The Rosicrucians, (not a religious organization) invite you to use the coupon opposite and receive the FREE copy of the fascinating, Sealed Book, with its startling tale of *self help*.

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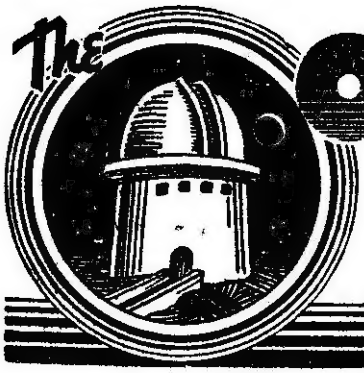


The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

WE WRITE this column with a severe case of nostalgia. Every time we glance at the contents page and let our eye run down the row of authors in this issue, we seem to be back in the good old days before Pearl Harbor. Every one of those names, with one exception, graced our contents pages before the war with amazing regularity. Now, for various reasons, they are absent. One reason: McGivern, Costello, Vance, Williams are in the army. Repp is busy in war work. Second reason, paper cuts have forced us to buy much less fiction.

THEN, you say, how come all these boys are back in this issue? Well, we hauled some of our precious manuscripts out of our files and made up a very special issue just as a sort of celebration over our recent victory in Italy, which brings the day when these authors will really be back much closer, and in celebration of another victory of even greater scope which we predict may come even before this issue hits the stands. Even Hitler knows his day is coming, and is he worried!

FIRST, in our special "service" issue is William P. McGivern's "The Mad Robot." It is featured on the cover by a very fine painting by Robert Fuqua, and we think you'll get a great kick out of one of the finest McGivern yarns of this type.

DEPARTING from our usual policy, and at the same time maintaining it—which sounds like a contradiction, but really isn't—our back cover this time illustrates a story, just as does our front cover. However, the back cover is also one of the series "Stories of the Stars"—so there's two shots in one gun. P. F. Costello did the story, "Phantom City of Luna." If you want a really fine interplanetary, with everything this top-notch author can put into such a story, this is it!

ROSS ROCKLYNNE took one of Magarian's illustrations and wrote 34,000 words about it. He wrote "Intruders from the Stars," an interplanetary yarn that'll make you kick your heels up for sheer delight. Ross wrote us and asked us to hurry this into type because the war might pass it by. However, we hand it to you as he wrote it, and we think you'll get a great kick out of comparing something written a year ago, with today's actual events—and when you finish, don't say our authors can't foretell the future along pretty accurate lines simply because they study the situation and apply logic to its future possibilities. We believe no writers use as much logic as the science fiction writer.

GERALD VANCE does a short story called "The Needle Points to Death," also interplanetary in nature. You might call this a special interplanetary issue too, if you want to. This is our last Vance story in the house. We have quite a few McGiverns, though, and we wish Vance had done as much before he left.

OLD Master Ed Earl Repp gives us "Master of the Living Dead"—and need we say more? This guy always gives us a good yarn!

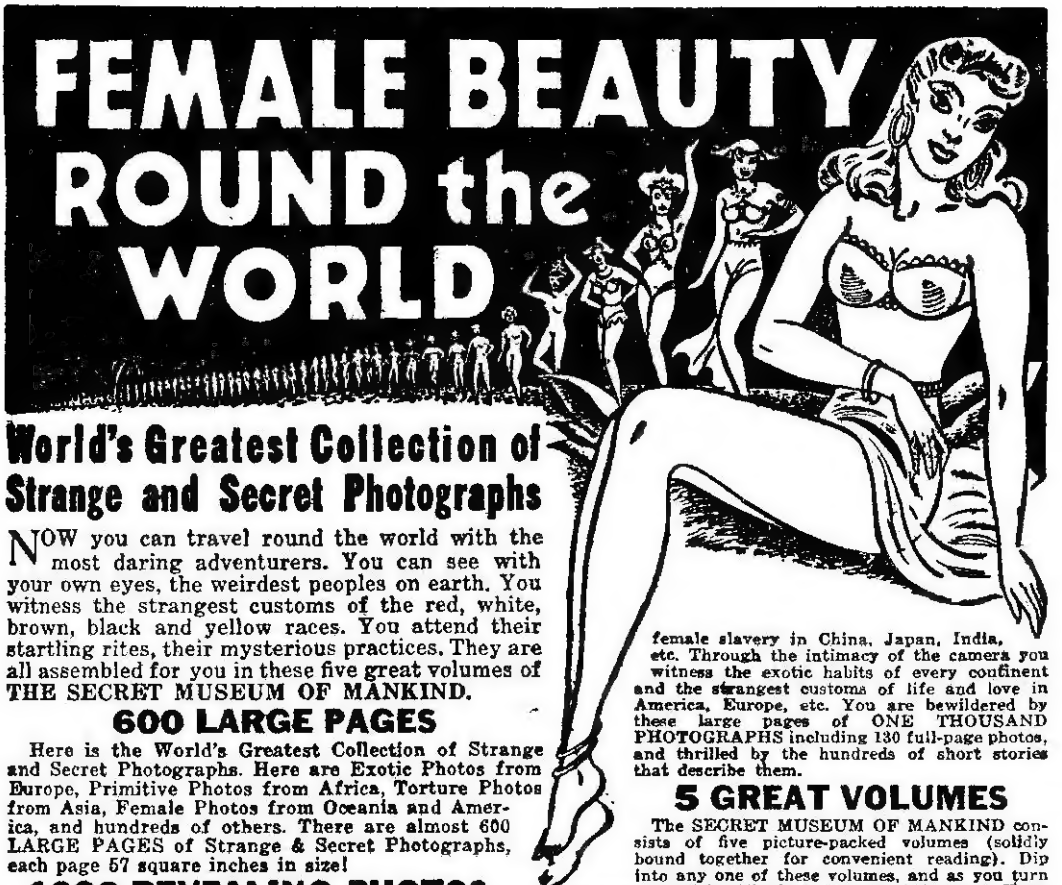
FINALLY, our newest author (in the army and out again on an honorable discharge) Berkeley Livingston, does "Island of Eternal Storm" which will thrill you with a new and weird concept about a "stone" from infinity, and about an island where life is something different entirely from what we know.

WE BELIEVE you'll sit up and draw a deep breath of admiration when you read Robert Moore Williams' "Battle Before Dawn." Here is a really fine story, by a really fine writer. Incidentally, Bob just sent us a manuscript—written while in the army! The only writer who has been able to do it so far for us! Needless to say we bought it ten seconds after we got a look at the first page! You'll see both in a coming issue.

AMAZING STORIES is still being published every two months (to answer the questions of many readers), and we alternate it with *Fantastic Adventures*. Thus, you still get a Ziff-Davis book each month, and we advise you to reserve your

(Continued on page 8)

FEMALE BEAUTY ROUND the WORLD



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(Continued from page 6)

copy at your newsstand, because believe us, they are becoming very rare! Your editor had to go out and buy one the other day!

BY THE way, there's some fine entertainment to fill the gap in our quarterly issued *Mammoth Detective*. You will be pleasantly surprised if you read it, to find a lot of your favorite science fiction authors performing in its pages. A new issue (containing a sensational 72,000 word novel by John Evans) will be on the stands on November 16. Why not get it?

THE next issue of AMAZING STORIES will contain Robert Bloch's finest story "It's A Small World," illustrated on the cover and interior by J. Allen St. John with some of his finest work. By all means don't miss it!

WE PRESENT here a letter from an old friend of yours, Arthur T. Harris, who apparently saw a reference to himself in our companion magazine *Fantastic Adventures*. However, the letter is so interesting, that we give it to you in this magazine, since all of you know him well. He says:

"Through clandestine channels, word reaches me that mention of my name appeared in the May, 1943 issue of *Fantastic Adventures*. Although I am presently engaged in matters of vital importance, I was at once struck with the thought that, after all, my friends in the world of science fiction have not forgotten me.

"Here, thousands of miles from home, while every hour I am engaged in those peculiarly complex activities which, I believe, will serve as a definite contribution to final victory, at the same time my thoughts often turn back to that brief interval between wars when I was permitted to exercise my talents in the realm of scientifiction.

"It is good to know that warm hearts still beat for me in the publishing business, for when the war is over, I expect to retire to my Connecticut farm to devote all my time to the writing of my World War II memoirs. I expect also to do some science fiction, as my current endeavors have led me into channels which are sometimes so esoteric as to demand the relief of fiction, since no other literary medium could convincingly portray the harsh, if hidden, peril of my present existence.

"As my readers will recall, my travels during and after the last war brought me in contact with Russian communists and the Chinese nationalists, not to mention incipient undercover movements in the Balkans and in certain countries of Central America. It is entirely possible that at the close of the present conflict, the Allies may see fit to permit my employment in Spain, Poland, or even Indo-China. Even then, I would consider myself one with science fiction."

THIS interesting letter from one of our war-bound authors is dated "Somewhere in the World, Sept. 15, 1943." Well, Arthur—we hope you are stationed in good old America when this war is over, and that you do more fiction for us then—perhaps using the strange truth you are now seeing in a fictional sense for our pages. Until then, good luck!

AS IS the custom of humans, we wonder if animals communicate with one another in any way? We note that the great apes bark at one another, that the love birds chirp so gaily one to the other.

Probably it is not so much just what is said, but rather just how and under what conditions it is said. The bark of a dog may mean many things at various times; at one time it may mean a desire to eat or be fed, at another it may be a sign of anger or reproach. The rooster is another one who speaks at the right time; at four in the morning the rooster's cry is interpreted as being a sign to humans to awake. At another time, when the rooster, having fought an enemy and won, crows, the crowing is interpreted as a victory cry or a sign of triumph.

A dog's wail has been interpreted as meaning the close approach of death to someone. Usually it means that music, irritating to the dog's sensitive eardrums is being played.

The beaver, who at times beats the ground with his tail, has also been accused of having a language all his own. Perhaps! It is known that the beavers beat their flat tails against the water during mating time. This may be to call the mate. Beavers also beat their tails against the water when an enemy approaches. The sound may be compared to a loud clap of one's hands.

There are very few who have not heard calves and lambs "baa." This action may be taken at various times. When they are strayed, it may be extremely helpful in aiding the mother to relocate her lost children. This cry may also be made when food is desired.

Birds sing during the mating season. Usually it is only the male which sings. This has been said to be a form of courtship rather than music to please human ears. Birds also have warning cries, a fact to which anyone who has hunted geese can well attest.

It would seem then, that animal language is quite simple, restricted to warning and mating calls, to cries of hunger, pain and conquest. Although interesting enough, it can hardly be compared to human language and speech.

(Continued on page 100)

for THIS battle, G.H.Q. is at YOUR own desk!

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So get this new family income plan working at once. Your local War Finance Committee will give you all the details of the new plan. Act today!

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AMAZING STORIES

THE MAD

By WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

RICK WESTON arrived at the Earth space-port outside Greater New York at six o'clock in the morning. He was driven directly to the mooring tower where his slim, fast pursuit single-seater was being readied for his trip to Jupiter.

The chief mechanic, a grizzled Scotchman, who loved machinery more than he did his wife, wiped his hands on an oil-stained rag and nodded to Rick.

"She's purrin' like a cat," he said enthusiastically. "Shouldn't give you no trouble at all."

"Well, it hadn't better," Rick smiled. "If something goes wrong out there in space I can't very well drop into a convenient mooring tower and have it fixed." He glanced at his watch and then looked down the long ramp that led to the central offices of the vast sprawling field.

"Has Captain Wilson been around?" he asked MacPurdy, the chief mechanic.

MacPurdy shook his head.

"Not yet, but he sent work over that he'd be here before you left."

"Good," Rick asid. "I'll go aboard and wait for him."

He had to stoop going through the door of the ship and turn his wide shoulders slightly. He was a big man with solid, capable features, but his weight was evenly distributed over his frame. There was a solemn expression on his face as he stepped into the small control cabin and began a careful, thorough check of the various panels and equipment. He was careful and deliberate in his inspection and when he finished he knew the ship was right.

He sat down then and lit a cigarette. His big frame was relaxed and his eyes were almost sleepy as they watched the

Dropping the girl to the ground, the mammoth figure of steel came down the slope toward Rick Weston

ROBOT

Rick Weston came to Jupiter and found himself in a maze of hate and intrigue—with insane robots used as animate tools

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smoke curl toward the ceiling in lazy blue spirals; but there was a suggestion of dormant power in his loose position and he looked as if he could move with speed if the need arose.

The cigarette had burned half its length when there was a step on the landing plank of the ship and a second later a tall, keen-eyed man in uniform appeared in the doorway of the control cabin.

"Early bird, as usual," he greeted Rick, smiling warmly. "Been here long?"

"Just a few minutes," Rick said, getting to his feet. He shook hands with Captain Wilson and said, "How soon do you want me to leave?"

"Right away," Captain Wilson said. He glanced about the small cabin with alert eyes. "Is the ship ready?"

Rick nodded.

"Fine," Captain Wilson said. He pursed his lips and frowned at the floor. "I want to talk to you a minute, Rick. You don't know why you're being sent to Jupiter, do you?"

Rick shook his head.

"My orders were to take this ship to Jupiter. As far as I'm concerned that's all there is to the assignment."

"There's more to it than that," Captain Wilson said. "I was asked by the divisional command to select a man for an important mission to Jupiter. I picked you, not because you're a personal friend, but because you are trustworthy, observant, and most important of all, close-mouthed."

"Thanks for the bouquets," Rick said, smiling faintly.

CAPTAIN WILSON glanced at Rick and his eyes were serious.

"You probably know," he said, "that the Earth-Mars council has for some time been conducting robot experiments on Jupiter. We have quite an extensive lay-out there, under the joint command of our Doctor Simon Farrel and a brilliant scientist from Mars, Ho Agar. We aren't completely satisfied with progress to date. And our Intelligence is vitally interested in a complete report of what's going on there. You are going to compile that report, Rick. You will have no official status, other than that of pilot in the Earth Space Command. Ostensibly you are making this trip to Jupiter to deliver supplies which are needed there. The supplies are in the storage compartment of the ship now. You'll have to depend on your own ingenuity to get the information we want."

"And just what is the information you want," Rick asked.

Captain Wilson shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"I can't tell you because we don't know. We don't suspect anyone, we aren't actually dissatisfied with the production figures and experimental reports that are sent us by Doctor Farrel, but we do want to know *if* anything is wrong. You've got to find that out."

Rick lit another cigarette slowly.

"What kind of a guy is Farrel?" he asked.

"Brilliant but eccentric," answered Captain Wilson. "He stands for no interference, no questioning, but goes his own way in his own time. That's why you are being sent in an unofficial capacity. If he suspected that you were spying on him I don't know what he'd do, but it wouldn't be anything calm or temperate. He'd likely destroy his formulae and tell us all to go to blue blazes."

"And how about the Martian—Ho Agar?"

"I don't know him personally," Captain Wilson said, "but his reputation as a scientist is one of the finest in the Universe. His work on metallurgy has

been absolutely amazing. And from all reports he is agreeable, easy to work with and thoroughly cooperative."

"Sounds all right," Rick said. "One other thing: what excuse will I have for hanging around there after I deliver my supplies? Won't it look suspicious if I don't return immediately?"

"That's been arranged," said Captain Wilson. "Orders will be sent to you there to wait for the next ship from Earth, which will be equipped with experimental apparatus. Your orders will be to transfer that equipment to your ship for the purpose of testing it at high speed on your return trip to Earth. That should ease any suspicion your delay in leaving might create."

"Good enough," Rick said. "You haven't given me much to go on, but I'll keep my eyes open."

"That's all I want you to do," Captain Wilson said. "Trust your common sense and observation. And if you find anything that you think should be reported immediately, don't use the communication sets at our Jupiter base. Take your ship out beyond the range of their interceptor frequency and send your message on the ship's set."

"I understand," Rick said. He glanced at his watch. "It's six-twenty now. Shall I be getting under way?"

"Right," Captain Wilson said. He shook hands with Rick and stepped to the door. "Luck. This is a big job, Rick, and you may need it."

"Thanks," Rick said. "I'll be careful."

WHEN the captain had gone Rick seated himself at the control panel and closed the switch that hermetically sealed the doors and the hatches of the ship. Then he signaled the field's central tower for clearance and turned on the juice that set the rear rockets throbbing.

When a brilliant flare shot up from the main tower in answer to his signal he was ready to go. He set the rocket rheostats at full power and slowly released the suction clamps that locked the ship in its mooring slot.

The atmosphere of Earth screamed past the sides of the ship as it blasted void-ward.

CHAPTER II

RICK WESTON arrived at the mighty planet of Jupiter seven days later. The great glowing orb of the greatest unit of the Solar system had grown steadily in his fore visi-screen with every passing hour; and now that he was within range of its atmosphere it obscured the entire surface of the screen.

He set the automatic controls and fired the fore repulsion rockets. His ship was slicing through Jupiter's heavy atmosphere and the sound of its passage was a thin high wail.

The mooring tower and group buildings of the Earth-Mars base were suddenly visible on his visi-screen and he felt his ship suddenly slide onto their beam and plummet directly toward the landing slot. He breathed a faint sigh of relief. Although he was a veteran of many such landings he never failed to feel grateful when his ship slanted onto a mechanical beam that would lead him directly and gently to the safety of a tower.

His speed was reduced to almost zero as the slim nose of the ship nuzzled softly into the tower socket. A compressed air lock snapped shut with a hiss and the ship stopped with a faint jar.

When he descended to the ground there was a short, swarthy man in uniform waiting for him. The man smiled and stuck out a hand.

"I'm Hawkins," he said, "charge of maintenance here. Have you got all the stuff we ordered?"

"I guess so," Rick said. "But I really wouldn't know. I'm just a pilot. Your supplies are in the rear storage locker of the ship."

"Fine," Hawkins said, "I'll have some of the boys get busy unloading right away. I suppose you're in a hurry to get started back."

Rick shrugged and said, "Not particularly. I feel like a little rest first."

He glanced around curiously at the vast factories and buildings that were shining under the pale cold light of the distant sun. The main building was a one-storied, duralloy structure that was at least a half-mile long. In the middle of the enclosure formed by flanking factories was a comfortable looking, four-storied buliding with curtained windows.

Hawkins followed his glance.

"That's the living-quarters of the scientists and technicians," he explained. "The long shed houses the robot assembly line."

Rick saw only a few workers about and he commented on that fact to Hawkins.

"There's only a dozen or so of us here altogether," Hawkins said. "Most of the work is done by completed robots."

"I see," Rick said. He glanced about a moment and then he lit a cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke into the cold thin air. "These robots seem to be the coming thing," he said absently. "They'll be ready for import to Earth and Mars pretty soon, won't they?"

Hawkins looked away and Rick saw that the man's face had become expressionless. It was as if a curtain had been pulled down suddenly over a lighted window.

"I wouldn't know about that," he said.

Rick didn't push the questioning any further. He knew a blank wall when he saw one. But Hawkins' reaction was interesting and he filed it away in his mind.

"Where can I find Dr. Farrel?" he asked.

"I suppose he's in his office now," Hawkins said.

"Where would that be?"

Hawkins gestured toward the four-storied building.

"Thanks. I'll be seeing you," Rick said, as he started for the doctor's office.

Hawkins smiled but his hard bright eyes were not amused.

"Sure," he said. "I'll be seeing you."

RICK crossed the cleared ground and entered the building that housed Doctor Farrel's office. A hall extended the length of the building and an open door led from this hall to a spare office, furnished with a desk, a laboratory bench and several chairs.

Rick took off his hat and stepped into this office. It was empty. He looked around curiously and then walked toward the desk.

A door on the other side of the room opened suddenly and a stooped, gray-haired man in ill-fitting clothes appeared and his eyes narrowed angrily as he saw Rick.

"Who are you?" he snapped, limping into the room. "What do you mean by snooping around my office?"

Rick felt the blood mounting to his face. He fought down his swiftly growing anger.

"I'm Captain Weston of the Earth Space Command," he said evenly. "I presume you're Doctor Farrel."

"Yes, I'm Doctor Farrel," the gray-haired man said, limping around behind his desk and sitting down. "What do you want?"

"I just arrived from Earth with a cargo of supplies," Rick answered. "I have some papers for you to sign."

Doctor Farrel grunted and picked up a glazed communication sheet from his desk.

"You're going to be here a while, Weston," he said. "I just got a message from Earth ordering you to remain here until another ship arrives." He tossed the message back to the desk and scowled at Rick. "What's it all about?" he snapped.

"I haven't the faintest idea in the world," Rick said quietly. "It's my business to take orders. I leave their interpretation to my superiors."

Doctor Farrel chewed viciously on his lower lip and glared at Rick. Rick noticed that the man's small eyes focused on his for only a second or so. They slid off his face and shifted to the top of the desk.

"You'll stay here at this building, until your ship arrives," he said. He looked up at Rick and his watery eyes held Rick's for a second, then shifted away again. "Keep away from the robot factories and don't question my men. I'll have no snooping interference in my work. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Rick said dryly. He forced back the angry words that quivered on his lips. He turned on his heel and started for the door.

"Just a minute," Doctor Farrel snapped. "I'm not through talking to you."

Rick turned in the doorway and his face was hard as chiseled granite. His steady gaze forced the doctor's eyes down to the desk.

"What do you want?" he said in a clipped, flat voice.

"I want to remind you that I am in complete charge here," Doctor Farrel said. "If you remember that we'll get along much better."

RICK opened his mouth to reply, but before he could speak, the door opened and a tall, dark-haired girl walked into the room.

"Hello, Dad," she said to the man behind the desk. "I——"

She noticed Rick then and her words trailed off in confusion. A flush of color appeared on her slim throat and crept upward to her cheeks. "I'm sorry," she said, turning to the door, "I didn't know you were busy."

"Stay where you are," Doctor Farrel said irritably. "Our guest," he added, sarcastically, "is just leaving."

Rick glanced at the girl and was surprised at her shy, hesitant beauty. Her hair, dark and lustrous, fell in simple waves to her shoulders and her features were regular and delicate. She wore a jacket and trousers of light soft leather and a wide belt was buckled about her slim waist. The costume was severely practical and yet the simple clothes accentuated the slim, gracious lines of her body. It seemed unbelievable that this lovely girl should be the daughter of the twisted, bitter man behind the desk.

Rick saw that the doctor did not intend to introduce him, so he nodded to the girl without speaking and left the room.

Outside, in the hall, he almost bumped into a tall, slender Martian. The Martian drew back and smiled pleasantly. He was as tall as Rick but he was thin, with the delicate bone-structure that was typical of his race. His lidless eyes were amber-colored, and the only difference in his appearance from that of an average Earthman was the boneless, spatulate nose and the pale greenish cast of his skin.

"You are Rick Weston, I suppose," he said, in a high, soft voice, that was not unpleasant. He extended a hand. "Hawkins told me of your arrival. I am Ho Agar. Permit me to welcome

you to our base."

Rick shook hands with him and said, "Thanks." He glanced at the door that led to Doctor Farrel's office and added dryly, "Doctor Farrel doesn't seem to share your sense of hospitality."

Ho Agar chuckled and patted Rick on the arm.

"Don't mind the doctor," he said. "He's a good sort underneath all that crust. You've got to know him a while before he warms up. When I first arrived I expected to be thrown out bodily before the week was over, but we get along excellently, now. Of course," he added with a grin, "there are still occasions when I think he'd like to have me boiled in oil, but they're becoming less frequent."

Rick felt his feeling of bitter anger cooling somewhat as a result of Ho Agar's friendliness.

"Well, I'm going to be here a little while," he said, "but I think I'll just keep out of his way. I don't think we'd ever develop a sweet, lasting friendship."

"Maybe not," Ho Agar smiled, "but the doctor will have forgotten he met you by tonight. You'll have to be introduced to him again at dinner."

"That's certainly something to look forward to," Rick said ironically.

Ho Agar laughed and then a look of friendly concern appeared on his face.

"I stand here gabbing," he said ruefully, "when you probably want to get to your room and get some rest. I'll take you up and see that you have everything you need. Come along."

"I'm not tired," Rick said, "but I would like to wash and get into some clean clothes."

HE FOLLOWED the Martian down the hall to an elevator that took them to the third floor. Ho Agar led him to a large comfortable room that had a shower and bath attached.

"You'll find everything simple and plain," Ho Agar said, "but I think you'll be comfortable." He sat down on the edge of the wide bed while Rick took off his leather jacket and shirt. "I'm on the same floor, a few doors down, so if you need anything at any time just give me a call."

"Thanks," Rick said. He sat down in a chair facing the Martian and lit a cigarette. "After meeting you I don't feel quite so much like an intruder." He shook his head ruefully and stared at the glowing tip of his cigarette. "Doctor Farrel practically ordered me to stay in my room until I was ready to leave for Earth again, and he told me to keep away from the robot factories in no uncertain terms. You'd think I was a well-known saboteur, to judge from his reception."

"You mustn't let that bother you," Ho Agar said. "He treats everyone that way. His life is completely absorbed with his work here and he is often suspicious and belligerent for no reason whatever. If you'd like to look over our plants I would be happy to act as your guide. The work we are doing here is not secretive and much of it is very interesting. Whenever you feel like taking a tour just let me know." He smiled. "You wouldn't know it to talk to Doctor Farrel but I am equally in command on this base. We don't have any arguments about the division of authority, because I let him do pretty much as he likes. I know that he is interested solely in the production of safe, dependable robot life and that is all that matters to me."

"I certainly appreciate your offer," Rick said. "I think I'd better take advantage of it as soon as possible, because I haven't any idea when my ship will arrive."

"Fine," Ho Agar said. "We'll go

immediately if you like. I don't have anything pressing to do right now, and, even if I did, I feel in the mood for a holiday." He got to his feet and walked to the door. "Will half an hour be too soon?"

"Not at all," Rick said. "I can wash and change in half that time."

CHAPTER III

A HALF hour later Rick and Ho Agar walked across the cleared compound to a graveled walk that led to the long steel shed that housed the robot assembly line.

"We've made great strides here," Ho Agar said, as he noted Rick's obvious interest in the sprawling factories. "Four years ago when Doctor Farrel and I arrived, this was as desolate a place as you could imagine."

"How about the doctor's daughter?" Rick asked. "I saw her but I didn't meet her. Did she come along with the doctor on the original trip?"

"You mean Rita," Ho Agar said. "She arrived about a year later. Her mother died on Earth and she had completed her schooling, so she joined her father here."

"Not a very normal life for a young girl," Rick said.

Ho Agar shrugged. "She seems contented. She acts as her father's secretary and is very efficient. She is not an easy girl to know, but I have found her very intelligent and charming."

They had reached the steel shed, and an armed guard unbolted and opened a massive steel door as they approached. Ho Agar nodded to the man and stepped through the doorway. He waited inside until Rick joined him, then he turned and swept his arm in a gesture that took in the entire mighty plant that stretched ahead of them for an unbroken mile.

"This is your first view of robot life at work," he said, over the noise of the factory. "Someday such scenes may be familiar to the entire world."

Rick stared in fascination at the hundreds of steel robots that were working with mechanical speed and rhythm beside the two long assembly lines. There was only an occasional human being visible throughout the great plant and these men were present in a supervising capacity.

Ho Agar smiled at Rick.

"It's rather impressive, isn't it?"

"It's wonderful," Rick said.

The robot workers were fashioning others of their kind. Each robot performed a specialized operation, for he had been expressly built. Some had intricate tools bolted to their wrists, others were equipped with long, sensitive steel fingers that moved with uncanny sureness and bewildering rapidity, checking delicate equipment, making minute adjustments on complicated rheostats and gauges. The robots were not uniform in shape. There were some constructed in a crouched position, others were built with extra-long arms or extra-long fingers to suit more perfectly the particular work they were doing.

The heads of the robots were simply steel balls, about eight inches in diameter, with a tiny slit in the front in which was set a high-powered lens. On the chest of each robot was a coil of fine filament wire, protected by a metal screen.

"The coils," Ho Agar explained, "are simply sensitive microphones that transmit orders to the brain of the robot. The lenses you see in their foreheads act as motion-picture cameras that impress the image of what they 'see' on the robot's brain. Those operations are simply mechanical," Ho Agar continued, as he led Rick down the long assembly line, "but the real problem has

been to find some way to give robots a mechanism that would act as a human brain to interpret orders."

"You seem to have solved that problem brilliantly," Rick said.

HE WATCHED a robot assembling tiny screws on the surface of a slim metal bar. The long, deft fingers moved swiftly, unerringly through the screw container, selecting the proper size and groove, then fitting them into the metal bar and moving them under a machine that automatically tightened them into place. "This robot here," he said, "is certainly more than a machine."

Ho Agar nodded. "All the workers here are completed and have passed all their tests." He glanced at a metal tag on the assembly line directly in front of the robot, on which were stamped the numerals 18435.

"Watch," he said to Rick. He turned slightly and spoke directly to the robot. "18435 cease work."

The robot stopped working immediately and waited motionlessly.

Ho Agar said to Rick, "You see they obey perfectly. They are not automatons, by any means. They actually use intelligence and reason of a sort in obeying our commands." He nodded to the robot. "You may resume work, 18435."

The robot commenced work again without an instant's hesitation.

Ho Agar walked along, pointing out various interesting phases of the robot activity, until they reached the end of the line. Ahead of them was a massive door, bolted and protected by a combination lock.

Ho Agar twirled the dial for several seconds, then swung the door open.

"Ordinarily only Doctor Farrel and I are permitted in this laboratory, but I think we can make an exception in your case," he said.

Rick followed him into a steel-walled, windowless room about forty feet square, equipped completely with delicate laboratory apparatus. One wall of the room was covered by a chest of small drawers that extended from floor to ceiling. Each drawer, of which there were thousands, bore a small white card on which a serial number and a chemical equation were inscribed.

In the center of the room was a steel table about four feet high, with powerful spring clamps at both ends and heavy leather straps dangling from its sides. There was a raised head-rest at one end of the table that was set between the cushioned jaws of a vise.

"It looks like a medieval rack," Rick said.

"Its purpose is more humane," Ho Agar smiled. "In this laboratory the robots are supplied with brains. Since the operation is highly delicate, we lock the robot into an immobile position, so that it won't inadvertently upset our work with an untimely movement. The head is secured in a vise and the arms and legs are held by these clamps."

"I see," Rick said. He was silent for a moment, then said, "I'd like to ask you a question, Ho Agar. You may consider it impertinent, but I'm going to take a chance. These robots I've seen work splendidly. Why aren't you able to export some of them to Earth and Mars, now, to take over some of the work they're able to do?"

HO AGAR shook his head slowly.

"We aren't ready yet," he said.

"That's what I'm asking," Rick said. "Why aren't they ready? They look ready." He shrugged and smiled. "Of course you can tell me to go to hell; it's none of my business, but I can't help being curious."

"Yes," Ho Agar said, "your curiosity is understandable." He sighed and sat

down slowly, as if he were suddenly very tired. There was a serious expression on his face that Rick hadn't seen before and his eyes were solemn.

"We are near success," he said. "Our robots are eminently satisfactory in most respects. I have no doubt that we could put a number of them into service in factories on Earth and Mars with excellent results. "But," he shrugged and smiled bitterly, "we can't be sure. Things have happened here that we have kept secret, because if they were known it might prejudice the public against ever accepting robot life. I am trying to explain to you that all the robots produced here have not been successful. Some we were forced to demobilize because they were too dangerous to have about. You see," he said, glancing up at Rick with an almost pleading expression on his face, "we can't take the chance of sending a robot from here that might, even years later, go berserk and destroy human life. We must continue our experiments until we are absolutely certain that our robots will operate favorably under all circumstances, until they wear out. There can be no compromise. We either succeed or we fail. We cannot be satisfied with anything less than perfection, because the results of imperfection would be too horrible to contemplate."

"But good lord," said Rick, "haven't you been able to figure out what causes these imperfections?"

"Not yet," Ho Agar said, with a bitter shake of his head. He was silent a moment, then added, "Do you remember when Doctor Farrel first announced his theory for the creation of practical robot life?"

Rick nodded. "That was about ten years ago, wasn't it? I was just twenty-two then, in training at the Earth space school."

"Then you probably know something of the methods we use to create intelligent robot life," Ho Agar said. "Do you remember, when Doctor Farrel's plan was adopted by the Earth-Mars Federation, that we began a universal appeal for persons of sound mental health to bequeath their brains to the Foundation after their death?"

"Yes, I remember that," Rick said, nodding. "There was considerable squeamishness on the public's part for a while, but they got over that. The idea of bequeathing brain tissue to be used in robots became as common as giving blood had been a few centuries before."

"Precisely," Ho Agar said. "Doctor Farrel collected brain tissue for five years before we actually began work on our first robot. I was selected by the doctor because of my experiments in grafting metal and flesh together. Doctor Farrel's theory is comparatively simple. He experimented for years at attempting to devise a brain of some synthetic substance that would act, in lay terminology, as a sounding board to carry commands to the robot's motor system. After trying thousands of substances he used human brain tissue, which had been kept alive electrically. The results, of course, were highly satisfactory, and he announced his plan for the collection of sufficient brain tissue to build a few hundred experimental robots. Actually in six years he received enough tissue to build millions of robots, for each robot only requires a section of brain tissue a half inch square."

"I REMEMBER the response was tremendous," Rick said. "I signed up and I don't think there was a cadet at the base who didn't. My best friend, Jimmy Haines, died shortly after, and his brain was sent to the Foundation. That's why I always had a sort of personal interest in the work here."

"Haines?" Ho Agar repeated, frowning. "He died on Mars, didn't he?"

Rick nodded. "He crashed. Forgot to set his automatic controls for landing and missed the beam."

"I remember the case," Ho Agar said. "His tissue was sent here with the first consignment. Of course, we keep no record of the various brain tissue, other than a serial number and chemical formula." He pointed to the thousands of drawers in the wall cabinet. "That's our present repository, and we have thousands more on Mars, waiting to be shipped here. But it's a safe guess that your friend's brain is at work right now somewhere on the assembly line. Of course, you understand, the will and memory and personality of James Haines ceased to exist when his brain was removed from his body."

"Yes, I know that," Rick said. But it was a peculiar feeling to realize that one of those metal creatures he had passed was being motivated through the medium of a man who had been dead for nine years and whom he had known intimately and loved like a brother.

"But the one thing Doctor Farrel hadn't foreseen," Ho Agar continued, "was that using human tissue in these metal robots would endow them with certain human qualities. And that's the way it has worked. Some of our robot products have been operating for four years, admirably. Others have been unsuccessful from the start. While still others have gone along month after month giving not the slightest trouble and then have gone wild, smashing machinery, attacking other robots within their reach and generally behaving like monsters." Ho Agar spread his hands in a helpless gesture. "Last month we had our first casualty. A robot went crazy on the line and destroyed one of our guards while the man was attempting to demobilize it. We are not ready yet to admit defeat, but unless our percentage of satisfactory robots takes a sharp upswing, we'll have to face the fact that we have failed utterly."

"I see," Rick said slowly. "I can understand, now," he said, after a moment's silence, "why Doctor Farrel hasn't got the time and energy to play the gracious host."

"Yes, it weighs on him terribly," Ho Agar said. "We all feel a sense of defeat, but the doctor holds himself responsible personally for the entire failure. His room is on our floor and many nights I hear him working hours after the rest of us have gone to bed for the night."

He stood up and smiled.

"So you see there is a real excuse for his bitterness. And now I think we had better be getting back. Dinner will be served soon and Miss Farrel likes to have everyone there on time."

When they left the laboratory Rick saw the swift darkness had fallen, and a wind had sprung up, beating against the metal sides of the buildings with cold, stinging blasts. There was the feel of rain in the air as they hurried across the cleared compound and into the four-storied building that housed their sleeping quarters.

CHAPTER IV

DINNER was served by candle-light in a long, wood-paneled room that was warmed by a roaring, open fire. There were eight at the table: Doctor Farrel sat at the head, flanked by Ho Agar and Hawkins, the chief of the maintenance division. Rita Farrel was at the foot of the table. Rick sat at her left beside an engineer named Webber, a gaunt, taciturn man who looked hungry. Across from him, on Ho Agar's side of the table, were two

research chemists, Morgan and Blair, both men in their middle fifties. Morgan was small, red-cheeked and balding; but Blair was a huge man with fiery red hair and bushy eyebrows that shadowed his small, peculiarly expressionless eyes.

Rick ate hungrily, for the food was excellent and it had been hours since he'd had a decent meal; but despite the attention he paid his food, he couldn't help noticing the strained, unnatural silence that dominated the room. Doctor Farrel ate little and his eyes circled the faces at the table restlessly.

The silence of the room was broken only by the growing fury of the storm that was blowing over the base. Great sheets of water smashed into the side of the building with a continual booming sound and above this the thin, high wail of the wind could be heard, screaming like a tortured animal.

Rick noticed that Rita Farrel shivered involuntarily as a wind-driven sheet of water struck the side of the building like surging surf, rattling the glasses on the table.

"Good night to be inside, isn't it?" he smiled.

She turned to him gratefully.

"It isn't that there's any danger," she said, "but the noise frightens me."

"I think it does everyone," Rick said. "The only advantage to storms in the void is that you never hear a thing. I remember once seeing two meteor swarms collide just beyond Earth's Heaviside layer, and it was like something from Dante's Inferno. But the only thing I heard was the sound of my cigarette striking the floor of the control cabin."

He went on talking to the girl and her nervousness faded gradually. Finally she laughed outright at something he said, and Rick saw her father's eyes focus in their direction. The old man looked irritable.

"Pardon me for interrupting your gay chatter," he said with heavy sarcasm, "but could I have your attention for a moment, Mr. Weston?"

"Certainly," Rick said.

"I have learned," Doctor Farrel said, settling back and placing his hands on the arms of his chair, "that you chose to disregard my instructions about visiting the robot assembly line. Was there any good reason for your violation of my orders or did you just spend the afternoon there because you found time heavy on your hands?"

"I was just curious," Rick said.

Hawkins looked at him and there was no smile on his face as he said, "That seems to be a predominant characteristic of yours, doesn't it?"

MORGAN, the red-cheeked, affable little chemist, smiled nervously.

"After all, gentlemen," he said with spurious heartiness, "where would science be today if men weren't curious?"

"Shut up, Morgan!" Doctor Farrel snapped. "I'm talking to Weston. I want to know, Weston, why you disregarded my orders and went snooping about the robot assembly plant?"

"Please, just one moment, Doctor," Ho Agar interposed suavely. "Mr. Weston is a guest of ours. It was at my invitation that he visited the robot plant. You are being unfair if you suppose he used his own initiative."

Doctor Farrel banged his fist suddenly on the table.

"It doesn't matter how he went there, or with whom he went," he shouted. "He was ordered not to, yet he deliberately chose to ignore that order."

"Please, Father," Rita Farrel said quietly. She glanced around the table. "Shall we have our coffee in the lounge?"

"An excellent idea, my dear," Morgan said, rising to his feet with alacrity.

Hawkins said, "I think I'll wait here until I have Weston's answer to the doctor's question."

Rick glanced at Hawkins. The man's swarthy face was flushed with anger. He wondered why his visit to the plant should have upset the doctor and Hawkins to such an extent.

"You don't like me, do you, Hawkins?" he asked quietly.

"I don't like snooping spies," Hawkins snapped. He stood up abruptly, knocking his chair to the floor. "I don't give a damn about the other men here but I'm serving warning on you right now: Keep out of my department, if you know what's good for you."

Rick smiled thinly and his face was bitterly hard.

"If I want to go into your department, Hawkins," he said, "don't try to stop me."

"I've said my piece," Hawkins said. He glared about the room for an instant and then strode through the doorway.

There was an uncomfortable silence in the room after Hawkins left. Rita Farrel stood up and the rest of the men rose to follow her into the lounge, a comfortable living-room with windows that overlooked the compound.

Farrel went directly to his office and the other men drifted away, leaving Ho Agar, Farrel's daughter and Rick alone in the room.

"You mustn't mind Father," Rita Farrel said to Rick, and there was an almost pleading note in her voice. "He's so nervous and overworked that he's snapping at everyone." Her eyes begged him to understand.

"I think," Ho Agar said in his soft voice, "that Rick understands what your father and all of us are undergoing." He moved to the window and drew the curtain aside as he spoke, and the almost continual bursts of lightning revealed the glistening, mile-long shed that housed the robot workers.

"Our robots are working harmoniously now, but none of us can guess when one or more of them might transform into a raging creature of destruction."

"Please!" Rita said, turning away from the window.

"I am sorry," Ho Agar said simply.

RICK looked over the wind-swept, rain-drenched compound at the mighty robot plant and felt a sensation that was close to terror as he thought of thousands of mighty metal creatures, working with unbroken, unchanging rhythm week after week, month after month, feeling nothing, caring for nothing but their appointed work. The realization that that limitless energy might at any instant be transformed into a blind destructive force was unnerving. Rick moved away from the window, feeling an irritation with himself for letting the tension of this place get on his nerves.

Ho Agar excused himself a while later and went to his room. Rick and the girl talked for awhile over their coffee, and he found her company charming. It and went to his room. Rick and the girl glanced at her watch and gave a low exclamation of surprise.

"Why, it's almost midnight," she said. "This is way past my bedtime." She stood up and extended her hand to Rick in a frank, impulsive gesture. "Thanks for tonight," she said. "It's been fun."

Rick smoked another cigarette after the girl had gone, then went up to his own room. He undressed slowly. The storm had increased in intensity and the blasts of lightning threw weird flickering shadows into his room. He

got into bed and stretched luxuriously. He switched off the light at the side of the bed and closed his eyes. In a few minutes he was asleep.

How long he slept he didn't know. Some subtle sixth sense warned him of danger and he found himself sitting upright in bed, staring into the darkness of the room, listening with straining ears for the sound that had awakened him.

The house was silent; but an instant later Rick's flesh crawled as the quiet darkness was shattered by a high-pitched scream of mortal horror.

CHAPTER V

RICK sprang out of bed and snapped on the lamp; he shoved his feet into shoes, jerked his trousers on over his pajamas and stepped into the corridor.

Doctor Farrel was just emerging from his room, fully clothed. There was a dazed, helpless look on his face as he stared at Rick.

"Rita!" he gasped feebly.

Ho Agar, the Martian, appeared in the doorway of his room. He looked as if he'd been sleeping, but his eyes were alert.

"The scream came from below," he said crisply. "Let's go down."

Rick followed him down the steps at a reckless run. When they reached the second floor, Ho Agar strode along the corridor to Rita's room. One glance told them an instant and terrible story.

The door was smashed open and was hanging crazily on one hinge. There was a hole in the center panel that could have been made only by a heavy bludgeon. Inside, the room was in wild disorder. Bedclothes were strewn about the floor, a chest of drawers had been hurled on its side, and the room was empty of life.

Rick felt a tightening in his chest as he stared dazedly at the smashed room. Rita's slippers and robe were lying on a chair, mute evidence that she had not left the room of her own will. Ho Agar touched his arm and pointed to the floor, to great gouged imprints that had been ripped and splintered in the wood.

"Those marks were made by the metal stumps of a robot," he said tensely. His fingers tightened on Rick's arm. "There's not a second to lose. One of the robots has gone berserk and taken Rita. We've got to find her before—"

Doctor Farrel appeared at the door, his eyes glazed with terror.

"Where is my daughter?" he cried wildly. He shoved past Rick into the room and stared in horror at the smashed room, the torn bedclothes.

"We don't know yet," Ho Agar said, "but we'll find her. I'm sure."

He drew Rick into the corridor.

"There are weapons downstairs," he said. "We must start the search immediately. We won't wait for the others."

Downstairs, in the lounge, Ho Agar took two powerful ray-rifles from a cabinet and handed one to Rick.

"They're l o a d e d with maximum charges and will melt anything within fifty yards," he said.

They strode into the main corridor. The front door of the structure, a solid oaken timber three inches thick had been torn completely from its frame and was lying in a crushed, splintered heap on the floor.

Ho Agar grabbed two coats from a closet off the main corridor and handed one to Rick.

"We'll need these," he shouted over the roar of the storm, which was whipping in through the open doorway. Outside, the ground was ankle-deep with rushing rivulets and the wind lashed at their faces like stinging

whips. Ho Agar bent low against the force of the storm and ran across the compound to a small steel hut built at the base of the mooring tower.

HE UNLOCKED the door and the wind snapped it open with a shattering bang. Rick had followed him across the compound and when he reached the steel hut, Ho Agar was emerging, carrying in his hands two phosphorous lamps, whose brilliant rays cut through the murk of the storm for hundreds of yards.

He handed one to Rick, then, shouting to make himself heard, he said, "Follow me. There are not many places a robot could hide in this area."

Rick nodded and set out after Ho Agar. He carried his rifle in the crook of his left arm and the lamp in his right. The glaring white rays of the latter danced ahead of him for dozens of yards, but there was nothing in its range but the lashing storm and puddled ground.

Ho Agar circled the great steel structure housing the robot assembly line and set out for the rocky wastes that surrounded the Earth-Mars base.

They struggled through ravines, waist-deep in surging water, clambered to the tops of slopes, where their powerful lamps illuminated the surrounding territory for hundreds of yards, then plunged on again, making a great, ever-widening circle about the base.

It was the lightning that eventually showed them their quarry. They were standing on the top of a slope, feet braced against the buffeting power of the storm, when a brilliant fork of lightning flashed over their heads; and by its searing light Rick saw a grotesque metal figure a few hundred yards from them, staggering crazily over the rutted, craggy ground. And in the creature's extended arms was Rita Farrel, still, white and pitifully small against the metal bulk of her captor, her dark hair streaming in the wind.

Rick grabbed Ho Agar's arm and pointed; but before the Martian could turn, the glare had faded and the darkness seemed intensified.

"Follow me!" Rick shouted.

He plunged down the slope, into a shallow valley that was half full of water, fought his way against the current and started across the uneven ground on the other side with all the speed, he could force from his aching legs and laboring lungs.

He tripped and sprawled headlong half a dozen times; and he couldn't be sure he was heading in the right direction, or that the robot hadn't changed his route; but he kept going, forcing one leg in front of the other, straining his eyes into the swirling blackness of the storm for some glimpse of the robot or the girl.

He had lost his lamp, and had left Ho Agar behind, but he drove on into the darkness, sobbing for breath and cursing the rutted, uneven ground that seemed to be working against him with diabolical purpose.

Another burst of lightning showed him nothing but the ragged terrain, stretching endlessly before him like some nightmare view of Hell.

HE STOPPED for an instant, his breath coming raggedly, and tried to think. He might be hundreds of yards off his course. Any of the falls he had taken might have set him off in the wrong direction; or the robot might have circled, or changed its direction after he had first sighted it.

But he couldn't stop now. There was a chance, growing slimmer each second, that the robot was still ahead of him, so he had to keep on moving forward.

He was at the base of a small slope when he started moving again, driving himself up with legs that ached and trembled. A few feet from the top of the slope he heard a noise directly ahead, and that same instant a brilliant fork of lightning ripped apart the darkness.

By its lurid light, Rick saw a great robot facing him from the top of the slope like some wild barbaric beast, its metal body gleaming in the light, its tremendous metal hands reaching toward him, fingers opening and closing convulsively.

The robot moved toward him. Rick tried to swing his gun into position but before he could do so the robot's great arm lashed out with the force of a battering ram, striking him on the shoulder and hurling him backward as if he'd been a toy doll.

He rolled down the rocky slope and the gun slipped from his hand and clattered to the base of the hill. His shoulder ached terribly and his whole side was gradually numbing from the effect of the robot's savage blow.

He crawled to his feet at the bottom of the slope and he heard the great metal feet of the robot plunging down the hill, powdering the rocky surface with their weight.

Blinded by pain and stunned by the blow he had received, Rick staggered back from the charging robot, but his foot caught on a rock and he sprawled helplessly to the ground. He started to crawl to his feet, but he felt a slim, metal surface under his hand and he realized with a sudden wild hope that he had found the ray-rifle he had dropped.

The robot was only a dozen feet away, groping toward him, his gleaming metal body shining faintly in the blackness, when Rick snapped the rifle to his shoulder and fired four murderous blasts as fast as he could trigger the weapon.

The smoking blue beams of energy struck out from the muzzle of the gun like flaming lances and Rick saw the body of the robot suddenly transformed into a shapeless mass of molten metal. There was the acrid smell of disintegrating steel in the air for an instant and then the body of the robot crashed to the rocky ground, arms and legs flailing in a last desperate convulsion.

Rick carefully circled the destroyed creature and struggled to the top of the slope. He found the girl lying beside a great boulder. Her eyes were closed but he saw that she was still breathing.

The flimsy nightdress she was wearing was wet and tattered and her face was blue with cold.

Rick removed his own coat and wrapped it about the unconscious girl, then he lifted her in his arms and started down the slope.

At the base of the slope he saw a phosphorous light in the distance coming in his direction, and a few seconds later Ho Agar appeared, drenched and muddy, his face anxious.

He glanced quickly at the girl in Rick's arms, then felt her pulse.

"She's all right," he said. "Nothing but shock and exposure. Where is the robot?"

Rick nodded toward the shapeless mass of twisted metal and Ho Agar swung his light on the molten remains of the robot. He moved to the side of the creature and removed a metal identification plaque from one of the arms.

He read the numerals and then glanced at Rick, an ironic smile on his face.

"This was 18435," he said quietly. "The model of industry we saw working so perfectly earlier today." He shrugged and tossed the metal plaque to the ground. "After this," he said,

his eyes bitter, "we can never be sure."

CHAPTER VI

"I CAN'T understand it," Doctor Farrel said, for the dozenth time. "I can't understand it." He was sitting in his office and his eyes were glazed and unseeing. "Robot 18435 has been operating perfectly for three and a half years. I can't understand this thing tonight."

Rick sipped his hot drink and pulled the blanket about his shoulders closer to his body. Ho Agar and Hawkins were seated on the opposite side of the room. The girl had been sleeping for an hour, now, under the effects of a powerful sedative her father had given her.

"You might understand," he said dryly, "if you'd been with me when that wild monster started charging." He shook his head and took another sip from his drink. "You know your work, Doctor, but if 18435 is as close as you can come to perfection in the creation of robots, you'd better stop trying."

"I'll never stop trying," the doctor said fiercely. His hand closed over a paper on his desk and crushed it to a shapeless ball. He glared at Rick. "There was something wrong with that robot, but we'll find the trouble and remedy it if it takes us the rest of our lives."

"It may take everyone's life," Rick said pointedly. "Doesn't the fact that your own daughter was almost killed by one of your imperfect creations convince you that you're tinkering with dynamite?"

"I recognize no personal element in this incident," Doctor Farrel said coldly. "The fact that Rita was endangered is no more significant from a scientific viewpoint than if it had been an absolute stranger."

Ho Agar cleared his throat as a prelude to diplomacy.

"We all admire your zeal, Doctor Farrel," he said. "But our results are becoming more negative with each passing month. Within a very short time my superiors are going to ask me for a complete report on my work here, and if I tell them the truth they will, I am sure, withdraw their support from this activity. No one will regret this more than I, but my regret does not alter the facts."

"I don't give a damn if everybody walks out on me," Doctor Farrel snarled. "This thing tonight doesn't prove a thing; it's just one case in a million."

"I'd say one case in a million is too many," Rick said.

Hawkins looked up at him and Rick saw that his swarthy face was flushed with anger.

"You're a hero now," he said bitterly. "So you feel you've got a right to shoot you're mouth off about things here you don't know a damn thing about." He stood up and his lips were twisted in a sneer. "Well, I, for one, don't have to sit around and listen. I've got two legs and I can leave when I want to."

Rick grinned thinly at the swarthy maintenance chief. He was fed-up with Hawkins' attitude and he was determined to be pushed no further.

"You've got a lot of teeth, also," he said gently, "but if you continue to annoy me, you may find a few of them missing."

Hawkins glared at him and, for an instant, Rick thought the man was going to lunge at him. His fists were clenched at his sides and his face was black with hate. But Hawkins held his anger with an obvious effort, turned

and strode from the office.

Rick relaxed and sipped his drink. He couldn't figure Hawkins out. The man was no coward, he'd bet on that, and he didn't seem to be a fool. With a slight shrug he dismissed the matter. A show-down was coming between Hawkins and himself, but worrying about it wouldn't help.

"I think," Ho Agar said, "that you had better try and get some sleep, Rick." He smiled faintly. "You've had a busy night."

"That's a good idea," Rick said . .

HE SLEPT late the next morning, then, after breakfast, he went up to see Rita Farrel. She was lying in bed, and except for the pallor of her skin and the purple shadows under her eyes she looked fairly well.

She greeted Rick with a smile, but as he sat on the edge of the bed and took her small hand in his, she stopped smiling and her face became serious.

"Ho Agar told me about last night," she said, "and there's nothing I can say to tell you how grateful I am."

Rick patted her hand gently and smiled.

"Let's forget all about it," he said. "How are you feeling?"

"Pretty good," she said, "I—Rick, there's something I want to ask you." Her eyes met his directly and her face was grave. "I feel that you're my friend and I think you'll be honest with me. Do you think my father has any right to go on with his experiments after last night?"

Rick had been afraid she might ask him that, and he'd hoped she wouldn't. "Do you mind if I smoke?" he said.

"No, but don't change the subject."

Rick lit a cigarette slowly.

"I'm no scientist," he said finally. "I don't pretend to understand your father's theory, but I know it apparently works in some cases, and in some it doesn't. Now, if these imperfections were simply mechanical, if the robots would, for instance, get out of gear and fail to perform their work as they should, it wouldn't be so serious. Any machine can break down, and generally it can be fixed." He paused and blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling and then shook his head. "These imperfections, as I see it, aren't mechanical. They're mental. And they take violent, homicidal turns. I don't think civilization would ever want to take the chance of using robots that might break down and go on a rampage like that one did last night. So unless your father has some absolute cure figured out, I think he is endangering the lives of everyone at this base, by continuing to operate the robots. I think they should all be disassembled until he has a perfect theory devised."

The girl had turned her face on the pillow as he spoke and now she said. "I was afraid you were going to say that, Rick. I realize how right you are, but," she turned to him again beseechingly, "won't you let him work along for a while longer? Your influence because of last night has grown enormously with the men. I know Moran is thinking of leaving and two of the engineers have threatened to quit. This means so much to Father that it would kill him if he were forced to stop now. I don't want you to do anything actively, but if you can help him, in any small way, I'd appreciate it more than you could ever know."

Rick grinned down at the girl and there was admiration in his eyes.

"You're certainly game," he said. "I think, however, you overestimate my influence around here. But if I can help I will. Frankly, I don't like the idea, but your say-so is good

enough for me."

He stood up and smoothed the soft hair back from her forehead. "I'm a sucker for a beautiful smile," he said. "Now you'd better try and rest."

HE LEFT the room and went downstairs. Ho Agar was alone.

"There's something I want you to do for me, if you will," Rick said.

"If I can," Ho Agar said.

"I'd like to spend tonight in the robot assembly laboratory," Rick said. "That's where the trouble started last night, and I'd like to be on hand tonight, in case there's a repetition. Chances are there won't be, but I want to be there just in case. Can you fix it?"

"Why, yes," Ho Agar said slowly He looked at Rick and there was a puzzled uncertainty in his eyes. "I hope you know what you're doing, Rick. It might be very dangerous."

"I know," Rick said, "but I'm playing a hunch."

"Do you want the others to know?"

Rick shook his head. "I'll turn in early and slip out later."

"All right," Ho Agar said, "I'll arrange everything." He shook his head somberly. "But I don't like it. If anything went wrong I'd feel personally responsible. Supposing one of those robots went mad and attacked you? You wouldn't have a chance of getting out of that plant alive!"

"Maybe not," Rick said, "but on the other hand, I may find out something about what causes these break-downs. The chance is worth taking."

Ho Agar argued no further. He inclined his head slightly. "I will arrange everything, Rick."

CHAPTER VII

THE robot assembly factory was dark except for infrequently placed phosphorous lamps, which cast a flickering illumination over the mile-long rows of tireless metal workers. There was no sound in the plant but the rasping jar of metal and the hum of machinery; no human voices, no laughter. Seen in the weird glow of the phosphorous lamps, the vast assembly lines looked like a futuristic concept of Hell.

There was only one human being in the entire factory. Rick had been let into the plant shortly after dark by Ho Agar. He had walked up and down the line of robot workers for an hour or so, but their conduct had been exemplary. Now he was standing in the shadow of great turbine and from that position he could command a view of the entire factory. He was beginning to feel that he had been foolish in taking the thousand-to-one chance that some trouble might develop here tonight. From what he had learned, the occasions when a robot had gone on the destructive warpath were few and far between. And he was wondering what good it would do if he did happen to be on hand when one of the robots went mad. If Doctor Farrel and Ho Agar couldn't correct the trouble, what could he hope to do?

He was idly watching the nearest group of robots, about fifty yards from him, while these thoughts were running through his head. There was one that was easily two feet taller than the others, for he had been constructed to work on an upper carriage of the line where height was essential. This robot was a giant, almost eight feet tall and probably weighing eight or nine hundred pounds.

Rick was watching this mighty creature perform his methodical task again and again with untiring strength and skill, and the sight was magnificent. The fluid, effortless flow of energy that motivated the great robot, the tireless

precision of its work and its almost unimaginable power were testimonials to the genius of Doctor Farrel. Watching the mighty machine creature, Rick was forced to realize the tremendous importance of the doctor's work. If creatures like this, perfect in every detail, could ever be produced satisfactorily, civilization would advance in one giant stride to the millennium.

But suddenly his muscles tensed; the cigarette in his hand dropped to the floor.

For the giant robot had stopped work, was turning slowly, purposefully, away from its position in the line.

Rick was deep in the shadows cast by the turbine and he knew he was beyond the range of the robot's vision; but he watched tensely as the giant creature moved slowly toward him, its great hands extended gropingly.

RICK backed into the deeper shadows formed by the corner of the wall and the turbine, but as the robot continued to advance, he realized with sudden sharp horror that he was cut off from any escape, for he had trapped himself in the angle of the corner.

He cursed the thoughtlessness that had prevented him from bringing a ray-rifle; he was completely unarmed, with nothing but his bare fists to oppose the giant robot, should the mighty creature attack.

The robot was still advancing, its heavy feet striking the concrete floor with shattering force. And Rick knew then that the creature had seen him, and was closing in on him with deliberate purpose.

He had waited too long. Had he moved the instant the creature left the line he could have gotten out of the corner, but it was too late for that now. He moved tentatively to the left, but the robot moved sideways with incredible speed, blocking off his attempt.

There was no doubt now of the robot's motive.

Rick could feel the hard desperate hammering of his heart as he backed another few feet from the robot's advance; but his shoulders touched the wall and he knew he was trapped. He risked a desperate glance over his head, but he saw that the turbine extended a full thirty feet in the air, and its sides were smooth steel, offering not the slightest handhold.

He wheeled back to the robot. The creature was only a few dozen feet away, and moving closer with each passing second.

Rick felt a desperate helplessness. There wasn't one thing he could do to save himself. His fists would be ridiculously impotent against the steel power of the giant robot.

But then, from the corner of his eye, he saw that another robot had left his place at the line and was losing rapidly in on the advancing giant monster.

Rick watched the second robot breathlessly. Was it coming to the aid of the giant creature? Or was it going to attack it from the rear? . .

His question was answered an instant later as the second robot hurled its bulk at the unprotected back of the giant monster, toppling it to the floor with a mighty crash.

The two creatures rolled wildly on the concrete floor, their steel-thewed arms and legs threshing convulsively. The Herculean combat was madly grotesque. No sound came from the locked monsters, except the harsh rasp of steel on steel.

Rick backed away from the titanic encounter, as gradually the superior weight of the first giant robot forced the other into helplessness. Astride the second robot, its greater weight pinning it to the floor, the giant mon-

ster's huge, battering fists began to pound into its sides with sledge-hammer force.

Rick watched with fascinated terror as the steel sides of the smaller robot began to bend under the terrific mauling. For a moment he was paralyzed by the horrible savagery of the giant creature's attack; then he leaped into action. He knew he might be sacrificed himself, but he couldn't stand helplessly by while the robot that had tried to save him was being pounded into a twisted, shapeless mass of metal.

THE giant robot's back was to him, and Rick lunged for the control panel that was riveted just below the creature's right shoulder. His desperate fingers had clawed the steel screen away before the giant robot realized that another antagonist had entered the struggle.

Rick jerked the screen aside and just as his hand plunged into the delicate wire apparatus that controlled the robot's actions, a great steel hand closed over his throat.

His breath stopped with a gasp, and he felt a cloud of blackness sweeping over him. With his last atom of strength his hand closed over the meshwork of filament in the robot's control section and, as he fell to the floor, his tensed fingers jerked the finely spun wires loose from their connecting rods.

He remembered striking the floor, and the feel of steel fingers about his neck, and then he passed out. How long he remained unconscious, he never knew, but when he finally raised his head and pulled himself to a sitting position, he saw that the giant robot was lying motionlessly on its side, and that the smaller robot who had saved him was standing erect.

Rick stood up with an effort. He glanced at the identification tag of the standing robot and read the numerals 161. He felt his bruised throat and swallowed painfully, then turned to Robot 161. The robot's sides were pounded out of shape in several places but it looked as if it were still in a functioning condition.

"You can go back to work, 161," he said.

The robot turned slowly, moved back to its place on the assembly line and resumed its work. Rick watched it for an instant and then he walked toward the exit door of the plant. There was a grim set to his jaw and his eyes were hard. He knew, now, that Doctor Farrel's robots did not go berserk without reason. Someone was deliberately seeing to it that they went mad. And that person had tried to have him destroyed. For he realized that the giant robot that had attacked him had not done so accidentally.

It had been ordered to kill him!

CHAPTER VIII

RICK went directly to Ho Agar's room and entered without knocking. The Martian looked up from the book he was reading and his yellow eyes regarded Rick with surprise.

"What's the matter?" he asked anxiously, putting the book down and rising to his feet. "I thought you were going to spend the night at the plant."

Rick told him quickly what had happened. Ho Agar listened intently, his face serious.

"I was afraid something like that might happen," he said. He frowned thoughtfully. "Did you get the identification number of the robot who came to your assistance?"

Rick nodded. "It was 161. And I'm convinced that the attack of the giant robot was not accidental. I'm sure that he was ordered to kill me by someone

here at the base."

Ho Agar pursed his lips and drew a slow breath through his teeth.

"What makes you believe that, Rick?" he asked.

"That creature was looking for me," Rick said flatly. "Maybe not me, personally, but it was after a human being. I was hidden in the shadows; it couldn't possibly have seen me when it left its place on the line, yet it headed directly for me. Furthermore I'm convinced, now, that Doctor Farrel's robots are all right, but that someone is deliberately making them appear to be imperfect, untrustworthy monsters. Now, here's what I want you to tell me; could someone operate the robots by a system of remote control?"

"Why, of course," Ho Agar said. His eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "Doctor Farrel developed a wireless system of communication that would direct the robot from distances of several miles. He worked on it quite extensively before you arrived but I haven't heard him mention it lately. I don't even know where the apparatus is now."

"I think," Rick said grimly, "that we may be getting warm. Do you think we could manage to search the doctor's quarters without his knowing it?"

"We could right now," Ho Agar said quickly. "He told me he intended to spend the night working in his office. His rooms are just a few doors from here, you know."

"Let's take a look," Rick said. "I hope we don't find anything, but we can't overlook the chance."

Ho Agar picked up a small flashlight and stuck a ray-revolver in his belt.

"If you're thinking what I am," he said tightly, "we may need a weapon before this night is over."

THEY went quickly to Doctor Farrel's room, opened the door and stepped inside. Rick snapped the lights on and glanced about. The room was in perfect order. The doctor's small desk was neat and bare. There were only a few letters and some pictures of himself and Rita on its clean surface. Rick winced inwardly as he saw the picture of Rita. It had been taken outdoors, and a wind was blowing the hair about her face. She was laughing, her teeth incredibly white against the tan of her face. He thought what would happen to that smile if his suspicions of her father were correct, and the thought brought him an instant of bleak misery.

But he couldn't let anything personal interfere with his work here. There had been times when he came near to forgetting that he was at this base under orders to investigate anything irregular or suspicious. He couldn't let himself forget that he had a job to do, and that Captain Wilson was depending on him.

Ho Agar had rummaged through bureau drawers and now he turned to the closet. His low, excited voice called Rick a moment later.

"Come here. I think I've found what we're looking for," he said.

Rick stepped into the closet and saw that Ho Agar had moved aside a picture that exposed a small, steel cabinet. When he opened the steel door Rick saw a control panel, covered with rheostats and gauges.

Ho Agar studied the apparatus intently. Rick watched him in silence.

"This is it," the Martian said finally. "It's the same panel the doctor built before you arrived. With it he can control the activity of every robot in his plant."

Rick stared at the equipment with hard, angry eyes.

"The man hasn't got a streak of human decency in his body," he said harshly. "He deliberately sacrificed his

daughter's safety to one of his robots, that was acting under his orders."

"We mustn't jump to conclusions," Ho Agar said quietly. "The existence of this apparatus is not conclusive proof that the doctor is responsible for the crimes of the robots. In itself, it proves nothing. After all, Doctor Farrel has a perfect right to install this control panel in his room, and possibly he hasn't been the one using it. Or there may be another such panel on the base, although the possibility of that is slight."

He closed the steel door and put the picture back in place.

"I think," he said, "that we had better wait until we discover more definite proof of his guilt before we say anything about this."

He stepped from the closet as he was speaking and walked to the doctor's desk. He glanced through the letters there, tossed them down and then lifted desk blotter. A single sheet of paper was lying beneath the blotter. He picked it up and read it carefully. Finally he handed it to Rick.

"This," he said, "explains much of what has been going on here at the base."

RICK read the letter. It was addressed to the doctor, but was not signed. However, the writer, the representative of a group of financiers on Earth, was not subtle in stating the purpose of his letter. For an unspecified, but evidently a large sum of money, the doctor was asked to stall the production of robots on Jupiter until the Earth authorities lost interest and abandoned the project.

Rick glanced from the letter to Ho Agar and his eyes were bitterly hard.

"I think this is all we need," he said. "There is no longer any doubt in my mind that the doctor has been responsible for the imperfect operation of the robots all along. I haven't mentioned this to anyone before, but I was sent here by the Earth authorities to investigate the situation."

Ho Agar regarded him with surprise.

"You have kept your mission well cloaked," he said.

"It was necessary," Rick said. "But now I intend to inform Earth immediately of Doctor Farrel's treachery. And I shall also tell them that they can plan to begin mass production of robots at their earliest convenience. That news should please your government too, Ho Agar."

"They will be gratified," Ho Agar said.

Rick was placing the letter on the desk when they heard heavy, jarring footsteps in the corridor and a second later the door was flung open and a robot moved into the room.

Ho Agar dropped back a pace and drew the ray weapon from his belt, but Rick caught his arm before he could fire.

"Wait!" he snapped.

The robot that stood motionless in the doorway was numbered 161, the same robot who had saved him in the plant from the attack of the giant monster. He recognized it easily from its battered, dented sides.

Ho Agar jerked his hand loose from Rick's grip.

"We can't take a chance," he said. "This robot may have been sent here by the doctor to destroy us."

"I don't think so," Rick said. "This is 161, the robot who saved my life. And it doesn't seem to have any violent intentions."

The robot lumbered forward slowly, its arms at its sides. When it reached the desk it pointed clumsily at a picture of the doctor and shook its head slowly.

"What does it mean?" Rick said to

Ho Agar. He stared in bewilderment at the robot, as it pointed again to the doctor's picture and shook its head again, more emphatically this time.

"I don't know," Ho Agar said. He turned to the robot and said, "Return to your work, 161."

But the robot made no move to obey. Ho Agar raised his gun.

"We can't take any chances," he said grimly. "When these creatures refuse to obey, there's only one thing to do."

THERE was suddenly another step in the corridor and Doctor Farrel appeared in the doorway, a gun in his hand. His eyes shifted about the room.

"What's going on here?" he cried.

He raised his gun and covered the entire group. "Don't anyone make a move until we get this thing settled."

Ho Agar moved suddenly to one side and his hand flicked out to the light switch, plunging the room into darkness. Blue bolts of energy stabbed across the blackness and Rick heard the doctor scream in agony.

Rick dropped to the floor. He saw the steel body of Robert 161 suddenly glow a cherry red, as blue blasts of energy raked across it, transforming it to a crumbling mass of molten metal.

Ho Agar said, "Are you all right, Rick?"

"Yes," Rick said.

The lights went on again and Rick saw that the doctor was lying in the doorway with two black holes in his forehead. The gun had fallen from his hand, a few inches from his distended fingers. Robot 161 was sprawled in a motionless heap on the floor, but as Rick watched its metal fingers began to move with agonizing slowness as they scratched the numeral 4 into the wooden surface of the floor.

Ho Agar was staring at the doctor's still form and there was a tight bitter set to his lips.

"I had to do it," he muttered. "It was the only thing I could do."

Rick nodded soberly and then he glanced back at the cryptic numeral 4 which Robot 161 had scratched into the flooring with its last energy.

His eyes were puzzled and thoughtful.

CHAPTER IX

TWO days later he talked to Rita Farrel for the first time since her father's death. She was sitting at the window of the lounge when he entered.

He said, "I want to talk to you for a moment, Rita."

She stood up and started for the door, but he moved his position and put his arm across the opening. "Please," he said.

She stared at him and her eyes were dark and heavy in the fragile whiteness of her face. There was no feeling or emotion for him in her expression, not even anger or hate. Her eyes were tired and indifferent.

"You can keep me here by force, I suppose," she said evenly, "but I don't see any point to that. There is nothing for us to talk about."

"You hate me because I was involved in your father's death," Rick said. "I don't blame you. I regret that it happened as it did. But there wasn't anything else Ho Agar could do."

"I see," Rita said. Her face and voice were empty of feeling. "Is that all you wanted to tell me? If you're through, I'd like to go to my room."

Rick felt a baffled feeling of exasperation at the girl's stony calmness.

"You can go to your room when I'm through talking," he said harshly. "You can't go on like this, Rita. You haven't eaten or slept in two days. The trouble here is over, you've got to

realize that and stop nursing a grudge against everybody. I know how deeply you loved your father and I realize he was probably kind and wonderful to you. But that doesn't alter the fact that the evidence indicates he was a traitor to Earth."

Rita turned from him blindly, her face twisted with pain. She put a hand weakly to her forehead and said, "NO! He couldn't have been a traitor! I—I won't believe that."

Rick took her hands and suddenly she was in his arms and he could feel the sobs that shook her slim shoulders.

"Oh, Rick, you didn't know him! No one really knew him," she cried.

Rick was silent until she stopped crying, then he patted her shoulders gently. "It's all right, honey; you'll feel better now."

She moved away from him and he gave her his handkerchief.

"Will you talk to me for a few minutes now?" he asked.

SHE nodded and he led her to the divan before the fire. He lit two cigarettes, handed one to her and then shifted about to face her squarely.

"Please listen carefully," he said. "I said the evidence indicated that your father might have been a traitor. But that evidence is all circumstantial. You were closer to your father than anyone else, and I think maybe you know something that would explain his actions. Can you remember his speaking of an offer from a group of financiers on Earth who wanted him to sabotage the production of robot life?"

Rita shook her head distractedly.

"Of course not, Rick," she said. "That's the most ridiculous thing in the whole set-up. Father would have sacrificed his own life before allowing anything to interfere with the robot plant. And here's another thing, Rick: those robots couldn't have done these terrible things on Father's orders because they are designed only to work. They would never attack a human being under anyone's orders. Father realized in later years they might be used as soldiers, so he designed them to do only creative work."

"But one of them attacked you," Rick said.

"I know, I know," Rita said helplessly. "But there must be some other explanation for that. Father's robots wouldn't attack anyone, even under his orders. He tested them for that, hundreds of times."

Rick stared at the girl intently.

"Are you sure of what you're saying? You mean your father actually tested these robots, ordered them to attack human beings, and they refused?"

"Yes," Rita said emphatically. "And he wasn't satisfied with one test. He tested each robot a number of times."

"I see," Rick said. He looked thoughtfully at the glowing tip of his cigarette. He was still of the opinion that Rita's father had been mixed up in the dirty business here, but a new idea had occurred to him.

"The thing that has me puzzled," he said, frowning, "is the action of Robot 161. That robot saved my life in the assembly plant, and when it came to your father's room it seemed to be trying to tell me something. It pointed to your father's picture and then shook its head. And after Ho Agar had burned it down, it scratched a number 4 on the floor. I've stewed over that until my head aches and I've gotten nowhere. What possible significance could the numeral 4 have in this business? Can you think of anything?"

"No," Rita said slowly, "I can't."

Rick heard a step in the corridor

and, turning his head, he saw Ho Agar appear in the doorway. The Martian looked from the girl to Rick and said, "I beg your pardon. I'll come back later."

"Come on in," Rick said, getting to his feet. "Rita and I are through with our discussion."

THE girl stood up and left the room without looking at Ho Agar. When they were alone, the Martian shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"She hates me," he said, and there was a look of pain on his thin features. "She thinks of me as her father's murderer. Her reaction is understandable but that makes it no easier to bear."

"I think she'll get over it," Rick said. He lit another cigarette and flicked the match into the fire. "By the way," he said abruptly, "have you had the communication equipment repaired yet? I should have been in contact with Earth forty-eight hours ago. Strange that it had to go on the blink just when I needed it most."

"It will be ready shortly, Rick," Ho Agar said. He looked thoughtfully at the young Earthman. "Are you going to report that Doctor Farrel's robot experiments were successful?"

"Why, of course," Rick said, surprised. "I told you that a couple of days ago. We agreed it was pretty obvious that the doctor had ordered the robots to go on a destructive rampage."

"Yes, I know," Ho Agar said, "but I wonder if the robots are ready yet for export to Earth and Mars. It would be a calamity if we were wrong in our suppositions and innocently sent out a group of imperfect robots."

"But there are no imperfect robots," Rick said. "I'm convinced of that, now. And I'm going to send that information to Earth just as soon as possible."

"Well," Ho Agar shrugged, "I suppose that it is the best procedure. There have been no disturbances in the robot plant since the doctor's death, which seems fairly conclusive evidence that he was responsible for their imperfect behavior."

"When the communication set is repaired I want to get that message off immediately," Rick said. "Will you let me know when it's ready?"

"Of course," Ho Agar said.

Rick left him, then, and went up to change for dinner. When he came down again, an hour or so later, Rita was waiting for him in the lounge. She had changed to a light, knee-length dress and her hair was brushed back from her forehead in clean, shining waves.

"You look simply terrific," Rick said, smiling at her in admiration.

"Thanks, Rick," she said. "I feel better, too, since our talk. I realize now that Father's development of robot life has been successfully accomplished, and that's all that really matters. He wouldn't have cared about what people thought, as long as his dream had been realized. And I think that now, wherever he is, he knew his work has been successful and is happy."

Rick looked at her, his face serious.

"You're a very wonderful girl, Rita," he said quietly. "There aren't many who'd take that attitude and I'm proud of you."

Rita smiled and said, "You make me sound a little awe-inspiring. I'm not the type for a halo, you know. Let's change the subject. Ho Agar was here a while ago, and he asked me to tell you that the communication set isn't ready yet, but he expects to have it in working order in another hour or so."

Rick shook his head in irritation.

"Where did he go, do you know?"

"No, I don't," Rita said. She glanced up as Moran, the chemist, and two other

workers entered the room. "Come in, gentlemen," she said. "Rick, here, is on edge because he can't send a message through to Earth, so maybe you can cheer him up."

"I'm just the one for that," Moran said, smiling genially. He went over to the sideboard and took up a bottle. "I'll fix you a drink that'll take your mind off everything." He mixed several drinks and passed them around. "And what is this message that can't wait until after dinner?" he asked.

"It's important," Rick said. "I want to inform Earth that Doctor Farrel's robots are in perfect working order and that they can be exported to Earth immediately."

"No wonder you're on edge," Moran said. "Good news like that can't be sent too quickly."

Rick was raising his drink to his mouth, when the door was flung open and Hawkins charged into the room. His dark features were flushed and his eyes were snapping blackly.

"What's up?" Rick asked.

Everyone in the room had turned to stare at Hawkins. A tension came over them as he stood in the doorway, legs spread wide, and stared about with hard, angry eyes.

"Hell to pay!" he snapped. "Two more robots have just gone crazy. They're on a rampage!"

The shocked silence following Hawkins' announcement was broken by a brittle, shattering sound as Rita Farrel's glass slipped from her hand to the floor.

CHAPTER X

RICK stood stock-still for an instant, frozen in rigid paralysis by Hawkins' words.

Moran said, "Well, I'll be damned," in a slow, incredulous voice.

"We can't just stand here," Hawkins said tersely. "I'm rounding up the men and starting for the plant. You men arm yourselves with ray rifles and follow as soon as possible."

He turned and left the room with long, decisive strides.

Rick tossed his cigarette into the fire and started for the doorway, but Rita Farrel caught his arm before he had taken three steps.

"Please, let me come with you, Rick." she said.

"No," Rick said. "This is no job for a girl. Don't worry, we'll be able to handle it all right."

Ho Agar appeared in the doorway while Rick was talking to the girl, and his eyebrows lifted questioningly as he regarded the Earthman.

"Trouble?" he asked calmly.

Rick nodded. "More robots running wild. Hawkins is taking the men down to the plant now, to stop them."

"I see," Ho Agar said. He shook his head slowly. "I'm afraid this destroys my last hope of producing harmless robot-life. Incidentally," he added ironically, "the communication set is repaired, but of course you can't very well send the message you intended."

"No, I can't," Rick said grimly, "but I'm going to send another equally as important."

"And that is . . . ?"

"I'm going to ask the Earth authorities," Rick said, "to send an official investigation committee here to get to the bottom of this trouble. I'm convinced now that there is something going on that none of us understands."

"I think you're right," Ho Agar said, "but let's attend to the imperfect robots before we do anything else."

"Rick," Rita cried, "please let me come along."

"We may need every weapon at the base before this is over," Ho Agar said,

glancing at Rick. "Miss Farrel is an excellent shot. I think we had better take her with us."

Rick said, "Okay, get yourself a rifle. I don't like the idea but Ho Agar is right. We may need you before we get things under control."

FIVE minutes later the three of them had reached the entrance to the robot plant. Hawkins was waiting outside with a group of armed men.

"We're going in the front entrance," he said, when Rick, Ho Agar and Rita arrived.

"Let me make a suggestion," Ho Agar said quickly. "Rick and Miss Farrel and I will go in through the rear entrance, the one that leads to the brain laboratory. You men go in the front and between us we'll have the robots caught in a cross-fire."

"Okay," Hawkins said, "but be careful of your aim. We don't want to burn each other into cinders."

Rick held Rita's arm as they hurried along the side of the robot plant behind Ho Agar. The night was black and occasionally they stumbled on the rutted, hard ground.

"Watch your step," Ho Agar called from in front of them. "And keep your weapons ready for use."

They reached the end of the building in about ten minutes. Rita's breath was coming hard, but she had kept up with the stiff pace Ho Agar had set.

The Martian turned the corner of the building and stopped before a solid steel door, protected with a combination lock. He worked silently in the darkness for several moments, then swung the door open and stepped through its black opening.

"Follow me," he said. "I'll have a light on in a moment."

Rick moved cautiously into the laboratory with Rita at his side. His hands, extended gropingly before him in the blackness, suddenly touched someone.

"Ho Agar," he said. "Is that you?"

There was no answer. Rick heard a footstep on the hard floor and he could dimly make out the outline of a man in the darkness.

A flashing premonition shot through him, and he stepped back quickly, but the sixth sense warning had come too late. He saw vaguely an arm swinging down in the darkness and the next instant a hard blunt object crashed with stunning force into his forehead.

His knees buckled and he started to fall. He fought against the curtain of blackness that was drawing over his consciousness, but it was no use. The last sound he heard was Rita Farrel's high, piercing scream, but that faded away too as his limp body struck the floor. . . .

WHEN consciousness returned he was aware of a light against the lids of his eyes, and when he attempted to move he realized he was strapped to a chair in a sitting position. There was an aching pain where he had been struck on the forehead, and his stomach felt restless.

He opened his eyes, raised his head with a painful effort. Ho Agar was standing before him, a faint mocking smile brushing his lips.

"Ah!" he murmured, "I'm relieved to see that you are yourself again."

Rick stared at him stupidly. He glanced dazedly about the steel-walled laboratory and down at the leather straps that bound him securely to the chair; then he looked up at Ho Agar agan, his brain reeling in helpless bewilderment.

"What's this all about?" he said thickly. He stared at the Martian's thin, mocking smile and he felt a sud-

den tight knot of terror in his breast. "Where's Rita?" he demanded, struggling against the tight leather straps.

"Don't waste your energy," Ho Agar said calmly. "I strapped you in that chair myself and there's no chance of your getting loose. As for Rita," he smiled and stepped aside, "she also is—ah—confined."

He pointed to the table on which robots were secured while their brains were being inserted.

Rita Farrel was lying on its steel surface, helplessly bound. Iron clamps held her ankles and wrists and her head was secured in the padded jaws of the giant vise. Her eyes were closed but Rick could see that she was breathing.

Hot, wild anger shot through him and he twisted futilely against the straps that held him and glared at Ho Agar.

"If you hurt her I'll tear you apart with my bare hands!" he raged. "You —"

"Please." Ho Agar smiled. He sat down comfortably and crossed his long legs. "I have no intention of hurting Miss Farrel. But I may be forced to, if you do not cooperate."

"What do you mean?" Rick said.

"I won't keep you in suspense any longer," Ho Agar said. "As you have probably guessed by now I have been responsible for the imperfect operation of the robot-life here on Jupiter. Poor Doctor Farrel was an innocent, industrious scientist and I found it a simple matter to throw the blame on him. Now I want you, my dear Rick, to send a message to Earth. I have a communication set in this laboratory and I wish you to inform your superiors that Doctor Farrel's robots are completely out of hand, and that his theories and robot designs are unfeasible. In short, that the entire experiment here has been a complete and dangerous failure."

Rick stared at Ho Agar incredulously. He couldn't make his mind absorb what the Martian was saying so calmly.

"You were responsible for the robot destruction here?" he finally said.

"Completely," Ho Agar said quietly. "My planet needs robot-life, Rick, and it needs the processes and formulae of Doctor Farrell; but we do not intend to share robot production with Earth. When we have the sole command of robot production we will become the leading planet of the Solar System." He smiled tightly. "Our relative position in the Solar System is fourth, but we will transform that, in a figurative sense, to first and foremost, through the power that Doctor Farrel's robots will bring us."

RICK stared at Ho Agar with blazing eyes.

"Mars, the fourth planet of the System!" he said bitterly. "That's what Robot 161 was trying to tell me. That was what the numeral 4 meant. And that's why it came to the doctor's room that night and tried to prevent you from murdering Doctor Farrel."

Ho Agar nodded and smiled.

"Everything you say is quite true," he said. "I have only your stupidity to thank for my continued success. At first I was afraid you were going to guess the truth, but like a typical sentimental Earthman, you were unable to think of me as an enemy because I had posed as your friend. I knew from the start that you were here as an investigator. Martian Intelligence informed me of that. I staged the kidnaping of Miss Farrel, hoping that would convince you of the unreliability of the doctor's robots; but you allowed your judgment to be blinded by Miss Farrel's undeniably attractive charms. I then had you attacked in the assembly

plant, hoping to get you out of the way, but the unfortunate intervention of Robot 161 spoiled my plans. There again your stupidity became my chief asset. Had you been thinking clearly you might have seen that I was the only one who knew of your presence that night at the robot plant, and therefore was the only person who could have arranged the attack. But that point escaped you. I didn't want to take any more chances so I showed you the apparatus in the doctor's room and then shot him when he came in to investigate the noises he had heard from below. Robot 161 almost upset my plans, but luck was with me and I put it out of the way at the same time. Incidentally," Ho Agar said, smiling mockingly, "it might interest you to know that the brain which motivated Robot 161 was taken from your friend whom we discussed here in this laboratory the day you arrived. I am referring to your comrade and fellow space-pilot, James Haines."

Jimmy Haines!

Rick felt a bitterness that was deeper than any emotion he had ever experienced in his life. He had no conscious thoughts; his brain was too numb for that. There was only one idea in his mind and it seemed to flow through his entire body. And that was the thought of getting his hands about Ho Agar's slender neck and choking the rotten life from the man.

"I still don't understand just how Robot 161 was able to disregard my orders," Ho Agar said musingly. "You see 161 was supposed to aid the giant robot in killing you; instead 161 saved you and destroyed the giant."

RICK was beginning to think again with some calmness, and he realized that his only chance was in keeping Ho Agar talking until Hawkins and his men subdued the rampaging robots and got to the laboratory.

He forced a smile to his lips.

"You were pretty clever," he said. "And since you hold all the cards, maybe you'll tell me how you managed to control the robots. I understand they wouldn't react to any but the work commands for which they were constructed."

"Absolutely right," Ho Agar said, smiling. "But fifty of the robots are special products of mine. Each of these special robots was equipped with *two* brains. One brain was normal and directed their activities at work. But the second brain, which was separated from the normal brain by a thin plastic sheet, I took from a special stock of demented, paranoic brains which were secured for me from certain institutions on Mars. When I needed a robot for a—ah—demonstration, I simply sent an electrical current from this laboratory to two poles which I had already built into the head of each special robot, and the plastic protection sheet was burned away, the normal brain destroyed, and the creature began to move under the direction of a paranoic brain which I could control. It was really very simple."

"You're out of your mind," Rick said evenly. "You'll never get away with this. Hawkins and the men are on their way through the plant now. They'll be here any minute. You can kill me and the girl but you'll never escape, yourself, and Mars will never get the formulae and theories of Doctor Farrel."

"I beg to differ with you," Ho Agar said smoothly. He held up a slim hand and cocked his head in a listening attitude. A contented smile appeared on his features as the faint sounds of mechanical clamor became audible.

"Hawkins and his brave men," he

murmured, "entered the plant to burn down two imperfect robots. That, at least, was what they thought."

HE CHUCKLED and rubbed his slim hands together in a pleased gesture. "Actually there are about forty-five paranoic robots in the plant, and I timed their eruption so it would occur when Hawkins and his men were in the center of the plant and unable to escape to the front entrance." He listened again to the clamor that was drifting faintly to their ears. "They won't have much chance against forty-five robots, will they, Rick?"

"You cold-blooded murderer!" Rick raged. "You've worked with those men for four years and now you send them to a horrible death without batting an eyebrow."

"Sentiment is a barbaric sort of expression," Ho Agar said idly. He shifted slightly in his chair and said, "and now, Rick, since I have been so obligingly verbose, I hope you will repay the favor and send the message I wish to Earth."

"Supposing I tell you to go to hell?" Rick said.

"That will gain you nothing," Ho Agar said. "And it might make Miss Farrel's next few minutes very uncomfortable." He raised a slim hand as Rick strained powerfully against his bonds. "Oh, I am not thinking of torturing her," he said. "I think you should credit me with more delicacy than that. I shall, however, be forced to anesthetize her and equip her with a paranoic brain which came, I believe, from a degenerate Martian. I wouldn't like to do that, Rick, but I don't think I shall have to. I don't think you will sit there and watch me perform an operation of that sort, when two minutes at this communication set will obviate that necessity."

"You wouldn't dare!" Rick said hoarsely.

"No?" Ho Agar smiled. "I think you underestimate me. I am going to give you just ten seconds to make up your mind."

"Supposing I do what you ask," Rick said. "What will you do to Rita then?"

Ho Agar shrugged. "I will probably take her to Mars with me to assist in the production of her father's robot units. But that doesn't matter. Anything, even death, would be preferable to the operation and brain substitution I propose to perform. I think you can see that."

Rita twisted slightly on the table and Rick saw that her eyelids were open.

"I've heard everything, Rick," she said clearly. "Don't send that message to Earth. It doesn't matter what happens to me. Please don't send it."

Ho Agar smiled and bowed mockingly to the helpless girl.

"A splendid sentiment, Miss Farrel," he said; "but the decision is Rick's." He turned back to Rick. "And what shall your decision be, my dear Rick?"

"I'll send the message," Rick said evenly.

"Excellent," Ho Agar said.

He walked to the wall, pulled out a portable space-communication set and rolled it to the side of Rick's chair, within easy reach.

"I shall release your right arm," he said, "but I'd advise you not to do anything foolish."

He drew a ray-revolver from his belt, then stopped and unbuckled the strap that secured Rick's right wrist. Stepping back a pace he pointed the gun at Rick's head and said, "Now go ahead. I am familiar with your code so don't think you can fool me with a fake message." He gestured impatiently with the gun. "Get busy. There is not too much time."

RICK reached for the key but at that instant there was a sudden shattering impact against the lab door and its steel sides trembled under the effects of tremendous blows.

Ho Agar swung toward the door and his eyes lost their calm triumph, as the mighty steel door began to sag inward.

His features working with savage terror, he wheeled back to Rick.

"Send that message, damn you!" he blazed. His trigger finger whitened with pressure as he stepped closer and shoved the gun against Rick's head. "Send it!" he repeated, his voice a desperate whisper.

Suddenly the massive steel door crashed inward and two mighty robots staggered into the room. Behind them was the swarthy figure of Hawkins, a ray-revolver in his hand.

Ho Agar spun around, but before he could pull the trigger of his gun Rick swung down across his wrist with his free hand, deflecting his aim. Hawkins took in the situation with one hard glance and then raised his gun and sent three streaking bolts of energy into Ho Agar's body.

The Martian screamed horribly and his face was a twisted mask of anguish and rage as he toppled to the floor. He fell on his side and for an instant his eyes met Rick's, and there was an insane gleam in their depths that was like a glimpse into the pits of Hell. And then the light faded in his eyes forever and he rolled limply to his back.

Hawkins crossed to Rick's side and released him, then the two men freed the girl. She clung to Rick, sobbing, when he lifted her from the steel table, but after a moment she smiled weakly.

"Sorry," she said. "It—it's just relief, I guess."

Hawkins was looking down at Ho Agar's lifeless body with bitter eyes.

"I never figured him," he said, shaking his head. He glanced at Rick. "How'd he manage it?"

Rick told him the complete story. When he finished Hawkins said, "It's just pure luck that we got here in time. When we found forty of those damn devilish robots on the warpath instead of just two, we thought we were goners; but I thought of something that should've occurred to us long ago. The doctor's robots are conditioned not to attack human beings, but they will attack other robots under orders. Just as we were about ready to toss in the sponge I yelled for help to the hundreds of peaceful robots and they didn't hesitate a minute. It was a madhouse out there on the line for a while but pretty soon they cornered and wrecked the defective robots, then went back to work." He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand and then grinned at Rick. "I had you figured all wrong, Weston. You're okay."

Rick held out his hand and smiled.

"Forget it," he said. "We were both way off in our estimates, I think."

Hawkins said, "Well, I'll let the men get busy cleaning up the mess out there." He nodded to Rick and then walked away from the laboratory, a faint smile on his dark features.

RICK lit two cigarettes carefully and handed one to the girl.

"It's all over," he said. "Ho Agar was right when he said I was a sentimental fool. I should've realized he was our man, but it just never occurred to me. If it hadn't been for Robot 161, neither of us would be alive right now."

Rita said, "I still don't understand how that particular robot was able to act of its own free will. Didn't Ho Agar say that it was one of the robots that he had equipped with two brains? And when he burned away the plastic sheet between the two, the normal brain

should have been destroyed, but it wasn't. It continued to operate and it directed the robot to you to warn you of Ho Agar."

Rick nodded somberly.

"Yes, the numeral 4 referred to Ho Agar, the Martian, the inhabitant of the fourth planet of our Solar System. I was a fool not to have thought of that. But I think I can understand why the paranoic brain didn't gain control of the robot's normal brain."

"Why?" Rita asked. "That's just the point I can't understand."

"Well—" Rick smiled faintly, and his thoughts were ten years back in time, to a red-haired youngster who had fought his way through the Earth space-school on sheer guts, "—you never knew Jimmy Haines, but he was a pretty stubborn guy."

He smiled into Rita's eyes and put his arm around her shoulders and drew her close to him.

"Maybe there's some other explanation but I prefer to believe that one."

"Ho Agar was right," Rita said gently. "You are a sentimental fool."

Rick grinned wryly. "I suppose so," he said. "Does that make any difference to you?"

"I wouldn't have you any other way," Rita smiled.

She raised herself on tip-toes and kissed him softly on the lips.

THE END

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Advertisement

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Robert Hooke

No matter what science this man peered into, he was its master. He was the true scientist-inventor!

ROBERT HOOKE was born July 18, 1635, at Freshwater, Isle of Wight, in England, and was educated at Westminster School in London and at Oxford. He became an instructor in geometry at Graham College, London, in 1664. In 1665, in collaboration with the Hon. Robert Boyle, they perfected an air pump which was a vast improvement on the one designed and successfully operated the year before by Von Guericke in his classical experiments on the vacuum in Germany.

On November 12, 1662 he was appointed curator of experiments to the Royal Society, of which he was elected a fellow in 1663, and filled the office during the remainder of his life. In 1666 the great fire occurred in London, which followed the great plague of the previous year, in which nearly 100,000 people died, about one-quarter of its population at the time. In the fire 1,300 houses and 19 churches were burned. When at last the fire was controlled, Hooke brought to the authorities a very well thought-out plan and model for rebuilding. But though he was appointed city engineer in 1667 his design was not adopted. He was secretary to the Royal Society between 1677 and 1683, publishing in 1681-82 the papers read before that body under the title of *Philosophical Collections*. The last twenty years of his life were devoted to research, and to his many inventions. He died on March 3, 1703, in London.

Hooke was a man of unusual ability, in fact, a genius. But unfortunately with this was coupled an irritable temperament. At times he was so peevish that he was constantly in trouble with associates and close friends. Nevertheless, his acuteness of perception was so marked a characteristic, that he reached many important conclusions in science for which he should be accorded the credit.

Hooke was really the first physicist to point out that the problems of planetary motion were purely matters of mechanics, and should be studied from that point of view, thus plainly intimating that forces of one or more kinds—as then unknown were the agencies which compelled the heavenly bodies to travel through the paths that observation showed they followed; thus anticipating the work of Newton. But he failed to develop the conception mathematically. More than a century and a half before Rumford demonstrated the identity of heat and motion, Hooke derided the opinion of his day that it was a fluid, or any kind of matter, and even suggested that it might be "an effect of motion."

In his book entitled "Micrographia," which was published by the Royal Society in 1665, in describing his work with the newly invented microscope, and which with characteristic ingenuity he had improved by compounding its lenses, he clearly described what he called the "little boxes or cells" that were revealed in the leaves of plants under observation, and which have since become to the biologists of the present day the units of organized life. If the achromatic lens, which was devised a century later, had been available to him, no doubt he would have discovered the minute particles of protoplasm that these "little boxes" contained, and detected their motion.

Hooke must be credited also with some views on the subject of fossils that were at least of a prophetic nature. In his day all such objects, when found, were gravely discussed as evidences of the Noachian Deluge. But when whole formations of chalk were shown by the microscope to consist entirely of the shells of minute organisms, he was among the first to declare boldly that some other and more reasonable explanation of their origin must be found, and even went so far as to express the opinion that it should be possible, through a study of the many different kinds of fossils then known, to arrive approximately at the relative ages of the rocks in which they occurred; a conclusion which has since been entirely confirmed.

In 1658, Hooke invented the balance wheel, which differentiates the watch from the clock, and made the former a possibility.

Hooke's scientific achievements would probably have been more striking if they had been less varied. He originated much, but perfected little. His optical investigations led him to adopt in an imperfect form the undulatory theory of light. He approached in a remarkable manner the discovery of universal gravitation. He invented the wheel barometer, discussed the application of barometrical indications to meteorological forecasting, and originated the idea of using the pendulum as a measure of gravity.

INTRUDERS from the STARS

By Ross Rocklynne

IN A planet that is far from Earth —how far away we dare not guess —the wooden slopes of the Valley of Kopeljin were alive with the dreadful sounds and radiances of battle. Dreadful to her who, at the rear of her armies, sought only, in her great, consuming rage, to save face, to avenge the ignominy done by those who had brought about her downfall.

But:

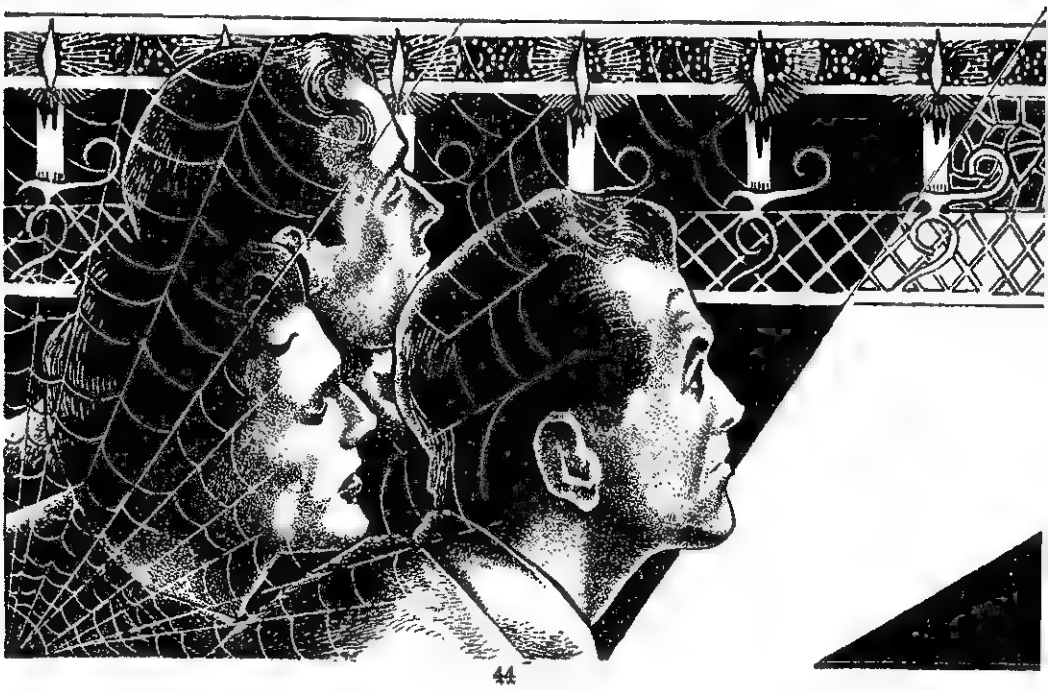
"Retreat!" she screamed. "Men! Why do you tarry when your mistress needs you? Retreat to the Knob, for this is the end of our empire!"

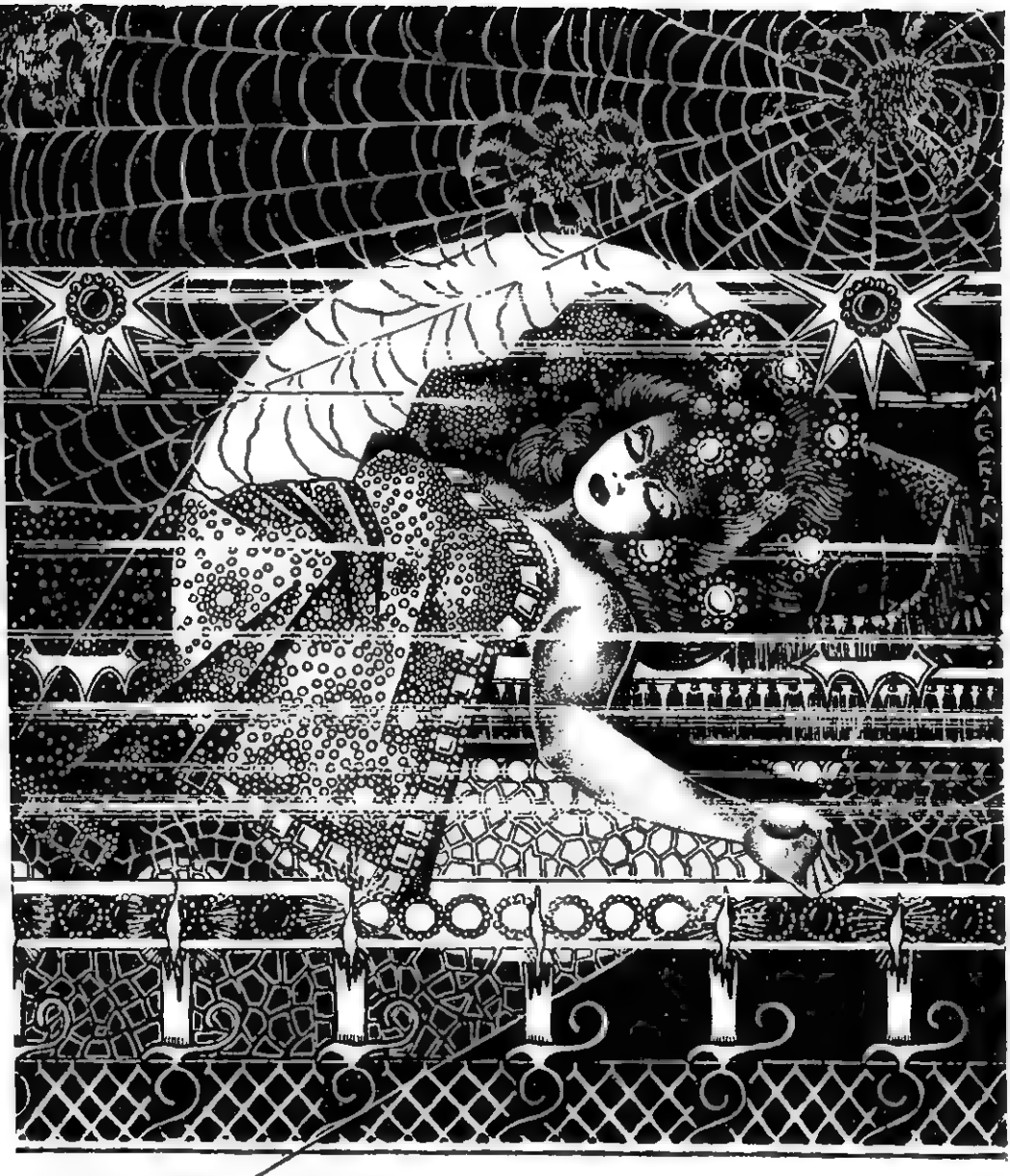
The end of empire indeed! Oh, the long, glorious months when Bess-Istra, the lowly, spat-upon slave-girl, sat on the throne of the planet, held its peoples in thrall!

Oh, the long, glorious reign that was ended when the prime minister, who sat at her right hand, turned against her, betrayed her, harried her, hurled her own armies against her, drove her back inch by inch, until she stood here with her dying loyalists around her, with their blood staining her arms and face.

The end of empire!

The tears of a scalding rage furrowed the grime of her face. The remnants of her legions were beating their way up through the wooded slopes of the Valley of Kopeljin—beating their way up and





The ray of light swept over a vision of breathtaking beauty

Earth lay helpless and supine before this lovely, evil woman from beyond the stars. Was there no way to defeat her?

dying without grandeur as the limitless forces of the enemy hurled balls of green, acid fire into their hopelessly depleted ranks; dying, as explosive lead pellets monotonously, chatteringly issued from the high chalk cliff to the right; dying, as enemy pilots, stretched out on their tiny, down-swooping gliders, vengefully dropped pill-size pellets from the night-darkened sky; dying as the pale, colorless, fan-shaped radiance of a monstrous beam fluffed across the width of the valley, fatally touching only those who did not carry the protecting *bik*—touching them and shriveling them slowly to nothingness; dying—but with the name of Bess-Istra on their lips!

Bess-Istra! She had flared for one moment, like a swift-dying nova! But the people of this planet would not soon forget her, would long remember her after she was gone, and their remembrances would be the remembrances of —*fear!*

She choked back her rage, her grief, to fondle that thought. She had left her imprint—aye! And now she would go!

"Retreat!" she screamed down into the bowl-shaped depression where the last of her men held a feeble line. "To the Knob! All is over! Bess-Istra commands you to follow after her, to guard her, to escort her to the Citadel where she shall make her escape!"

Most came, scrambling up the hill toward her; a few remained behind with a cannon-ray projector, to guard the retreat. Bess-Istra would never see them again, nor they her. But they were content, for to a man they worshipped her, looked upon her very footprints as hallowed ground, though she had plunged a planet into rivers of blood, out of her own selfish passions.

Her chief officer moved behind her with long, gaunt stride as she swiftly followed a precipitous path. Before her, two soldiers hacked away the obtruding branches of the waxy trees, so that her way might be without hindrance or discomfort. And so they finally came to the base of the Knob, the great, immeasurably thick dome of natural iron ore which capped this hill, and whose interior formed—the Citadel!

BESS-ISTRA stopped, her breasts heaving. She made a motion to her chief officer.

"The valve, Bandro! Quick!"

Bandro stepped forward on the moist, leafy ground, his long slim fingers sweeping camouflaging weeds from the broad, man-size valve which would give entrance to the Citadel. While he worked at the complex lock with sure, delicate touch, his impassive, gray-seeming face turned toward Bess-Istra.

"We could yet make a truce, Mistress Bess; by that path at least we would retain life. By the other, we invite death."

She struck him across the face—savagely.

"You dare suggest it!" she cried. "You, Bandro, whom I trust! You would have me humble myself to him who deceived me! Let me not hear of this again."

Bandro stood rock still, gray eyes lidded and concealing his emotions and his thoughts; his love for this girl at that moment turning into hate.

He turned woodenly back to the valve, worked on it for precious moments. Bess-Istra faced affrightedly into the backward distance, hearing the dreadful sounds of an annihilating battle, knowing that her thousands of remaining men were shriveling away under the awful weapons being turned against them.

"Quick! Oh, quick!"

"The valve opens, my lady," said Bandro.

And indeed it did, just as the pale ray across the valley began to walk across the ground toward Bess-Istra and the hundred loyalists who surrounded her. They had no protection against that ray, they had no *biks*. But once they were in the Citadel, there were few man-made forces that could rout them out or harm them within the space of several days. And by that time, Bess-Istra and those of her empire who loved her would be gone.

Bandro now led the way down through the palely lighted corridor. One of Bess-Istra's lieutenants stood at the mouth of the tunnel, gathering in the remnants of the army, screaming at them above the furious cacophonies of battle. The valve would remain open as long as there was the mere chance of rescuing one of Bess-Istra's men. Then it would be closed—and though the might of the enemy was hurled against it, they would not destroy that impregnable door. The only way they could get through would be to utterly wreck and annihilate the Knob itself; then it would be too late.

They came into the great central room of the Citadel without fanfare. One of Bess-Istra's mechanics came quietly to her.

"You have need of the ship, then, Mistress Bess?"

"Our very lives depend on it now. And the ship is prepared for its long journey into the deeps of space?"

"Another day will see us prepared."

"Good. It shall be a day of rest. I am weary to death, and my men are weary also." She turned to Bandro, who stood to her right, regarding her impassively from his darkly mottled eyes; stood with his billowing cape tossed loosely over his arm, the blood-red scimitar, symbol of Bess-Istra's short-lived reign, on his swelling, powerful chest. But impassive though he was she sensed his deep hostility.

Her glorious, scarlet lips curled now. "I know your thoughts," she whispered. "You think that I have but dragged you with me into a death-trap. You curse the day your lot was ever cast with mine."

EMOTION at last touched his gray skin, quivered the nostrils of his straight nose. His voice quivered also, but so deeply that one could almost count the separate vibrations.

"I gave up life and love and family that I might at last taste power—that I might feel in me the strength of millions of men as they did my will."

He sucked a lip-shivering breath through his teeth; his chest rose and fell quickly. He ground out, speaking under only the greatest restraint, "And now what have I? What? A rat-hole to dwell in for awhile, while the enemy pounds from outside—and a space-ship to be dumped into, to be gassed, to sleep for uncounted years—and not even to know on what barren celestial flotsam I shall crash to my end, along with her who is responsible for my fate."

"You presume!" she cried, white with fury. Her hand dropped to the deadly spastic-gun at her curving hip. "Mark you, Bandro, I would as lief kill you as not—"

"As you have killed others for as little reason," Bandro shot out. The wild expression of utter panic now crossed his face like wildfire. "A truce!" he suddenly cried, so that dozens of those near heard him. "A truce! Demand of Bess-Istra that she makes a truce with the enemy. Aye, and for what reason does she not? Because she knows that, though we who have supported her would be given leniency, *she* would die!

"But she is sending us into certain death. This dream of hers—this fantastic belief of hers that the escape ship will hurl through space for countless years, and land on a planet of her choosing — land *safely!* Will hurl through space, to land while we are lying in frozen sleep, unconscious of elapsed time. It is a mad dream, this plan of hers—"

Bandro never knew what hit him. He stiffened, stood stick-like for one shocked second. Then he knotted up, head between his legs, teeter-tottered a moment, then rolled to his side, where he lay quiet and unconscious, the muscles of his body straining to contract in unrelenting spasm.

Bess-Istra straightened from her savagely tigerish half-crouch. She sheathed the spastic-gun, in which tiny lights were dying. She laughed a harsh, unpleasant laugh.

"Fool!" she spat. She stepped forward, kicked the helpless man. Then she whirled, stood fork-legged, glaring at the dozen men who looked at her with sullen faces. She said no word, but held their eyes until the flush of shame stained their brows.

Bess-Istra laughed again. "And you are fools, too, for listening to Bandro's indictment and considering it! Know you not that I would not betray you?"

Under the bewitching angry languor of her glorious eyes they could not long maintain their sullenness. Their faces dropped. And Bess-Istra cried, "About your business then, soldiers! There is much loading of armament into the hulls of the escape ship to be done; armaments and munitions that will give us fair start in the conquest of another planet not far from here. Begone—and take this upstart Bandro with you and roll him into an empty corner of the ship. He is still a valuable man, and he will be grateful to me for taking him with me when we awake from our sleep."

So saying, Bess-Istra walked with supple, yet fatigued, stride to her quarters; but her brows were drawn down frowningly, sadly, over her barbarian eyes. An episode was drawing to a close, a golden day had turned to lead; she wanted but one thing, now, wanted it passionately—the neck of the man who had betrayed her between her fingers!

ONE day passed; one day being that length of time required for that far-distant planet to turn once on its axis.

The enemy harried the Citadel with the full outpouring of their frightful weapons. And finally, a bare few moments from the time that the great, armed escape ship was to be plummeted into the deeps of space, Bess-Istra was called to the television cubby, where the hard, yet war-weary, eyes of her arch-enemy bit into hers.

"I call you," he said wearily, "only because I have the good of my people in mind, Bess-Istra. I—"

She interrupted him. "Traitor! Beast whom I trusted! Would that I could but drive a dirk into your heart!" She made a savage, utterly unrestrained motion, came close to the television screen until it seemed that her blazing eyes would sear him. "Do not talk to me of the good of your people. Such words are but hypocritical mouthings. You seek the good of the people no more that did I—you seek only to flaunt your own power over them, for you yourself have felt the acid of lowly, ignominious beginnins!"

"Not true, Bess-Istra," he made sad answer, and on his weary face there was pity for her. "I have never been driven by selfish motives."

"What do you want of me, traitor?"

"Of you, Bess-Istra, I want only yourself. For all your tyranny, the tyranny which at last compelled me to betray you, the people could be swayed by you as by no other in all our history. They loved you, though you whipped them."

A muscle in his hard, drawn face twitched. There was pleading in his eyes. Unconsciously, he extended his hands in a pleading gesture.

"Forget this mad desire for power, Mistress Bess! Remember only of the great good you can do the people. This cruelty that you have so often shown is but an outward garment in which you clothe yourself. The cruel avenging, tyrannical Bess-Istra is not the true Bess-Istra. The true Bess-Istra is gentle, soft, merciful, feminine — a woman both lovable and admirable. Bess-Istra—return to my side and rule with me!"

Her lashes lowered over her glorious, gold-flecked eyes, her full lips writhed into a taunting yet voluptuous smile. "You love me, fool," she said huskily.

His shoulders fell. "Yes. But it is not for that reason alone that I wish you to return. It is because I know there is in you more good than evil. Bess-Istra—together we could rebuild a war-shattered world! Will you return?"

FOR a long moment she said nothing, savoring the hope that grew in his eyes with every moment of her hesitation. Then she burst into a wild, taunting laugh. She cried:

"*No!* That is my answer, my final answer. And I am glad that you asked me—glad that you love me—for now your torture at my refusal will be all the greater! Now, take your face from my sight forever!"

The muscles of his face slowly whitened. He said in a horrible voice, "I am compelled to slay you and all those in your garrison, Bess-Istra."

Her hands were on her hips, her eyes widened in mock amazement. "Indeed! Know then, that when you destroy the Knob, and break into the Citadel, no soldier, and no Bess-Istra shall be found. The Citadel shall be an empty shell for no life shall be here."

He studied her with pain-shadowed eyes. His voice was flat.

"How?"

And she laughed again. "*How!* Now let that mystery torture you to the end of your days! Farewell!"

His face faded as she flipped the toggle switch—faded forever. And on Bess-Istra's face was only a look of gloating triumph. She could leave this planet now, knowing that in great measure she had avenged herself on the man who had caused her downfall.

She thought over what he had said concerning her softness, her inner gentleness. A dark sneer grew on her lips. The utter fool for thinking such obvious nonsense!

She sought out her chief mechanic. "Tell me, now. Is the ship ready for its long journey? Have the soldiers been loaded into their acceleration chambers? Does the ship bristle with those very weapons which harried us into our hole?"

"All ready and waiting your command, Mistress Bess."

She laughed joyously. "Then let us leave this planet forever. Relieve Bandro of his spastic slumbers, bind him in the acceleration chamber which his rank affords him; for if he were to undergo the Sleep with common soldiers, they would have no respect for him and so would be useless to me. Inform him that I forgive his loss of control—inform him that I graciously retain his as my second in command.

"Come now; there is no reason to

tarry longer. To the ship!"

Nor was there reason to tarry longer. The giant cylindrical ship was loaded with its thousand remaining soldiers of the army; with deadly weapons; with armaments and munitions. And its nose was shoved into the tube-runway that would give it exit from the Citadel —and from the planet.

Empire's end! But so certain was Bess-Istra that there was no fatal flaw in her fantastic plan, that she knew another empire, perhaps greater, lay beyond the vast sweeps of space the escape ship would take her. Another empire! A new empire for Bess-Istra, once the spat-upon slave-girl!

And so an era ended, the era of Bess-Istra upon that planet. Nevermore would she be seen there—nevermore! She was gone, gone so swiftly that no eye knew of her going—for the escape ship snapped away into open space much as a watermelon seed is flicked away when pressed between thumb and index finger.

Flicked away—immediately soared into tremendous, appalling speed—left that solar system under the guiding hand of the navigator—plunged headlong into the unimaginable emptiness of interstellar space—settled down to a steady, void-consuming pace—a pace it would continue, according to Bess-Istra's plan, for thirteen full years.

THE navigator, the brilliant scientist who had invented the first spaceship under the guidance of Bess-Istra, swung around on his chair, his too-bright eyes fixed on hers.

"It is done, Mistress Bess," he breathed. "My genius has succeeded in the most monumental calculation ever undertaken by mind of man. Though the next solar system lies a full light-year distant, though the planet which you and I have studied in detail through the *tele*-eye travels on a complex orbit, the escape ship shall land there gently, safely, thirteen years from now! And we shall conquer that planet, vanquish its peoples!"

"Then—" said Bess-Istra "—then we are ready for—the Sleep! Oh, Sab-Hallo, you have done well indeed, and shall have a position of power under me. But tell me, Sab-Hallo. By what means shall the ship land with no hand to guide it?"

"You need not worry, Mistress Bess. Long before the ship lands, radio-echoes will let robot controls know how far away the planet is. The ship will brake its speed accordingly. And when the distance from the planet is zero, the ship's speed relative to the planet will be zero.

"Other instruments which measure the heat given off by those people we intend to conquer will make certain that the ship lands on an isolated spot.

"And as soon as the ship lands, a strategically placed lever will activate a mechanism which will dissipate the Sleep-gas, will provide normal air. Then we shall awaken, in full possession of our senses, ready to do battle."

Bess-Istra, in spite of herself, felt an inward shrinking sensation. Here in the control room, nothing but a transparent partition staved off vacuous space. Stars—stars in endless number, lonely, lonely! How deep was space; how bottomless and frightening.

"And," she whispered, "what if we should perchance miss our destined landing place, Sab-Hallo? Would we . . . die?"

"Die?" The thought was terrifying to the conceited Sab-Hallo. "No—*no!* I have made provisions. The Sleep-gas will last—forever! And some day the ship would land on another habitable planet, perhaps even in another solar system."

"It is good." She sighed. "But of course, we will land on the planet of our choosing, and to think otherwise is foolish. Come, Sab-Hallo, leave the controls—and let us pump the ship full of the Sleep-gas. . . ."

. . . And it was done! Soldiers drew the straps around themselves in response to the command that was issued. They breathed deep of the odorless vapor that soon filtered in from the ventilation ducts; breathed deep and slept.

Bandro, thoughts alive with his hatred of Bess-Istra, slept.

And Sab-Hallo, unafraid, pleased with himself, certain of the perfect operation of the many strange instruments which composed this ship, slept.

And Bess-Istra lay languidly on her couch in the observation room, her glorious, gold-flecked eyes surveying empty space. Soft, gentle, transparent straps held her to the couch, for there was no gravity.

There she lay, breathing deeply, no longer afraid of the star-dusted void, but rather admiring its chilling beauty. It was necessary that she should lie here in full view of that abyss. Necessary to abate the sense of loneliness, of wretched depression that now gripped her. There was something soothing, comforting in that velvet darkness. . . .

As soothing as the vapors which now were drawn into her lungs, and which now stole from every tiniest cell of her body any semblance of life; caused her lungs to cease breathing, her heart to stop, her blood to halt in its veins and arteries; her brain to stop thinking. This was—the Sleep.

And Bess-Istra—*slept!*

SLEPT for how long? Who knows? *Not* for thirteen years, as she and Sab-Hallo had supposed. For the escape ship did not land on the planet at which it was aimed!

Did *not!* The scientists of that planet were wiser than Sab-Hallo had known. Wiser by infinitely more than most of the many races of the universe that bear the human form. And more peace loving. Those scientists had their own *tele*-eye, and with it they searched Bess-Istra's ship; searched it, knew its history, its terrible purpose—understood all this when the ship was a mere hundred million miles away.

And so from that planet which Bess-Istra thought to have conquered came a powerful beam of force which gently, unjarringly, grasped the escape ship; changed its course, ever so subtly; shunted it into a new path but slightly different from the old; guided it out of that solar system; sent it boring without change of speed out into interstellar space again. That planet would never be bothered by Bess-Istra.

And that path the ship took and kept—and would keep until, perchance, it should enter another solar system far removed from this one.

Then would it land automatically on another planet?

Who knew? Certainly not Bess-Istra, who slept with her lifeless face to the changing stars. . . .

And how long ago was this? When did all this happen?

Longer ago than any of us dares to think. . . .

CHAPTER I

"They Worship Another God!"

CRACK!

Crack!

Crack!

"Hey!"

The ejaculation was a roar of rage that shivered the dripping lianas snaking through the wet foliage of a midsummer African jungle.

"Put down that rifle! Quit shooting at me! I'm no damned Jap!"

"Sorry, brother," an austere voice at last spoke from behind the banana plant. The gun was lowered. "The very lions of the jungles these days might be Japanese—who, I agree with you, are damned; damned, almost to the point where they are beyond redemption. However, had I hit you, you need not have been alarmed. The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away."

"Praise the Lord," gasped the thoroughly unnerved voice of Bill van Astor-Smythe, ace legman of the New York Corey Features Syndicate, "and *spare* the ammunition!"

He broke from his shelter in the ravine, his feet sinking ankle deep in the decaying humus of the Portuguese East African jungle. His black hair was in disarray, his khaki shorts and shirt torn and befouled with swamp mud and studded with tenacious burrs. Bloody thorn scratches made tit-tat-toe patterns on arms and thighs. To his bosom, as if it were purest gold, he clasped a portable typewriter, which, upon examination, would have proved to be vintage 1929. No matter! It worked and *any* typewriter that was available and that worked was a precious thing indeed in this year of 1944.

As he weaved across the clearing, he was grinning a cockeyed grin in spite of the evidence that an unfriendly jungle had mauled him around.

"Hip, hip, Reverend!" he yelped. "As I live and breathe, I'm glad to see a human being again! The incident is forgiven and forgotten. Which way to the mission and a juicy alligator steak? Boy! What wouldn't I give for a hot bath Astor-Smythe style. I'm lousy."

He tottered suddenly. He sat down on his portable, propping his dizzy head in his palms.

"Wow! Who'd have ever guessed those Japs would come along and riddle those poor British lads? Didn't have a chance, not one of them. I was in the rear of the British column and we were just an hour out from Lorenzo Marques when they ambushed us. Bet you anything I was the only one got off with a whole skin. . . . Damn! This is fierce!"

He had a pounding headache, nausea. He couldn't see straight. But suddenly the man who had shot at him was holding out a canteen and a quinine pill. Bill washed the pill down gratefully. After a few more dizzy moments he jumped up and weaved a circle around his typewriter.

"Boy! Hell! That's better. Fever's gone, but my head is ringing. Thanks!"

The kneeling man rose. He was dressed in shorts, too, but a ministerial closed collar was around his neck.

"Thank the Lord, brother; I am but His servant!" he intoned.

"Thank God, then! I'm a servant, too. I serve the press, a sort of god in its own right. Let me introduce myself, Reverend—you are a reverend, of course?"

"As the Lord maketh me, so am I."

"Okay, okay! But what's the handle?"

THE other's brows drew down over studious, serious eyes that couldn't have seen more years than Bill's twenty-six.

"Handle?" His lips broke into a puzzled, almost shy smile. He said softly. "Oh! I am the Reverend John Stevens—and this—"

He pointed to a nondescript, pinched-looking companion who now emerged from the jungle and stood near him.

"—and this is my assistant, Thomas Reynolds."

Bill grabbed Reynolds' hand.

"Pleased to meet you, Reynolds—and you, Johnny—er, Reverend." He also grabbed at Stevens' hand, dropped it hastily when he saw Stevens wince. "And I'm Bill van Astor-Smythe, of the snooty, snobby, nasty, nose-raising, blue-blooded van Astor-Smythes. Ain't —I mean isn't that something to live down? Boy, you should have seen the old man when I shipped myself off to England three years ago as a special war correspondent-on-trial for my syndicate."

The memory made him shout with joy, so that a half-dozen polychromatic parrots ceased their painful jargon and fluffed their wings with frightened squawks.

The Reverend John Stevens had cause for alarm, too. He closed his hand around Bill's arm, looked around affrightedly.

"Please—I beg you!"

"Eh?"

"Japanese! I have no way of knowing what inroads they have made into Mozambique, nor where the British front is laid down. But such an untoward sound as you have just made might draw them in this direction if a party of them were near."

"Yeah, yeah. Sorry. I see what you mean. Maybe we better get back to the mission, huh? You *have* got a mission, haven't you?"

"By the grace of God, yes. It is a little place, but I am able to say that the several hundred Bantus who live in this region have been converted to the true religion. That is—"

He paused. His eyes shifted worriedly, as if he were conscious of a sin he had committed. A sudden despair tugged at his lips. "That is, I believed until yesterday that they had been converted. Now it seems . . . doubtful. Yesterday morning, a great many candle holders and candles were missing from the altar. I questioned my house-boy patiently and . . . and he broke down. He gave me no details, but I understand that my parishioners are—" he dropped his eyes hopelessly "—well, that they are worshipping another god of their own choosing."

"You don't say! The dirty heathens!"

"Oh, please don't condemn them, for they know not what they do. But . . . well, I am not on my way to the mission, as you suppose, but to the village where I understand the new idol has been erected."

He patted the Garand rifle which had given Bill van Astor-Smythe an uncomfortable few minutes. His lips, which had seemed pleasant only, and a little shy, now turned hard.

"And then I shall strike down the clay image which my straying sheep have raised in mockery of the true God." He raised his hand on high, and his blue eyes acquired an expression of terrible wrath, "The Lord our God," he cried, "is exceeding fearful when wickedness tarries in the breast, my children; he shall flay from thee the sins which I, and my father before me. have sought out and tried to destroy, verily—"

"Cut!" Bill van Astor-Smythe yelled He was standing with his hands on his hips and grinning. As Stevens lowered his hand and blinked at him, Bill grinned. "That kind of junk is for the movies, pal! It's sob-sister stuff, see?"

"Sob-sister?" Stevens blinked. Then he got a woe-begone expression on his face, and all the religious rapture faded. His shoulders slumped. "I understand," he said unhappily. "The mission has been my home all my life, you see, and during the last five years—since my father died—" He stopped, gulping.

Bill looked at him with pity. "Sure, sure, I get it. You've been cooped up

here away from the world all your life, playing spiritual nurse-maid to a bunch of frizzy-headed Zulus. Well, pal, it looks like the end is in sight. Day after tomorrow, the Nips will be pad-padding through your jungle and making a GHQ out of your mosquito-proof parlor, Johnny."

STEVENS' dismay showed in his eyes. "Oh, not really!" he pleaded. "You mean that Mozambique will fall to the enemy? You mean to say the gallant Tommies won't hold their own?"

"I double-mean it." As carelessly as Bill spoke, his fists knotted, and sparks of anger showed in his narrowed eyes. "And not only that, Madagascar across Mozambique Channel is filthy all the way to the interior with Japanese batallions. It's the pay-off, the big blow-up —and the Allies are in a he—that is, a melluva hess."

Bill picked up his portable. "Come on! I'll help you play truant officer on the hooky players having truck with the old-time religion. Better give me another of those quinine pills, though. Da—darn! Wish I had a *kepi* to shunt this water down my back instead of my neck."

Bill was feeling a thousand times better as they forced their way through that dripping tropical forest. He was light of heart, cocky of tongue, and breezy of manner under normal conditions, and normal conditions for him were very close to a state of affairs which would madden most other people. Bill had sat on the chalk cliffs of Dover with a telescope and this very typewriter, as the hundreds of fishing smacks came beating across the Channel from Dunkirk loaded with their grimy soldiers. On the way from Bataan to Corregidor his typewriter keys had given the Jap shore batteries some tough competition—at least from the standpoint of racket. And by plane to Australia he kept up the infernal noise. Only, the New York Corey Features Syndicate did not consider his cabled news infernal. That syndicate smeared Bill's reportorial adventures all over the bottom of the front page of ninety daily newspapers throughout the land.

And from Australia to the Solomons, to the Aleutians; a stretch on Midway; some madness on the Libyan Desert, bouncing along in a tough American jeep hot on the heels of Rommel's African army; and from thence across the Mediterranean where the Allies were striking at Italy, the "soft belly of the Axis dragon."

Then new developments. The Suez-Red Sea route to the South Pacific was not yet safe for Allied shipping, and supply ships were making the long journey down around the tip of Africa—the Cape of Good Hope. Thence these supply ships were constrained to beat up along the East Coast, passing directly through Mozambique Channel, which was flanked on one side by Mozambique (Portuguese East Africa) and on the other by the island of Madagascar.

In Mozambique Channel, Axis submarines had sunk tons upon tons of Allied shipping, using Madagascar as a secret base. To prevent the Germans from taking over Madagascar from the neutral French, and thus controlling the sea route entirely, Britain had taken over the Island in 1942.

But Madagascar was only half the problem. Across the channel was Mozambique, which might at any time be seized from neutral Portugal by Germany, and which already harbored a Nazi consul who used his diplomatic immunity to cable Germany fatal information concerning Allied ship movements through the Channel.

Britain had completed the job by gaining Portugal's tacit assent to oc-

cupy Mozambique, also. They held the Portuguese possession for hardly more than a month when the Japs launched a simultaneous attack on both island and mainland.

And now, in midsummer of 1944, the Allied sea route around Africa was imperiled.

BILL VAN ASTOR-SMYTHE cheerfully explained all this to the Reverend John Stevens and his companion. Neither having been isolated, was apparently well-informed.

Stevens was leading the way, seeking out paths and short-cuts around and across swamps thick with mangroves.

"A boy scout, too!" Bill gasped admiringly. "You find your way around like a bush native, Johnny. Someday I'll do the same for you, maybe, along the complicated wilderness trails of li'l ol' New York. If the Nips don't get us—which they probably will."

Stevens said nothing; he kept on pushing ahead, his jaw righteously grim. Bill felt a flash of respect for the young missionary. Even though the Japs were bound to make things uncomfortable in a few short days, Stevens was going to disabuse his "parishoners" of the notion that there would be more than one true God.

Bill for the first time seriously considered this alleged new god. He was curious. What or who were the natives worshipping? Probably nothing very exciting, of course. Probably nothing at all. Stevens had merely heard a rumor which was just that, and nothing more. But still, perhaps Bill could get a story out of it. A half-dozen sticks of type, maybe. . . .

And so he was shocked when, with the gloom of falling night, they came to the edge of a glade and saw that which threw all of Bill's (and, indeed, all of humanity's) smug beliefs in the uniqueness of the planet Earth into a cocked hat.

A space ship!

CHAPTER II

The Awakening

THE three men suddenly stopped in the concealing growth of wild maize on the edge of the oval-shaped glade. Stevens' breath drew through his teeth. His arm shot out, forced his two companions to their knees.

Bill gaped. Slow dizzy thoughts began to parade across his consciousness. The scene at which he looked was beyond the pale of common sense.

Hardly twenty feet away from him, seated cross-legged on the ground, were a half-dozen white-haired, fuzzy-headed Kaffirs. They were sitting in front of drums which were made by stretching antelope skins across hollowed-out tree trunks. The Kaffirs were moaning softly, weirdly, almost inaudibly. They swayed back and forth, while their fingers brushed at their drums and made a wild barbaric rhythm which Bill had to strain his ears to hear.

Their heads were raised toward the "god" they were keeping vigil over—a sleeping girl!

The girl was not all. There was the cylindrical-shaped ship. At least, Bill had the crazy feeling that it had to be a ship. It had only two portholes, and outside of that, no protruding features. But if it was a ship, it was no ordinary ship, for its incredibly hard-looking metal surface had a slight tinge of greenness, like the patina that covers ancient things. And though this patina was not extremely noticeable, Bill had the feeling that this ship was older than any man-made thing. *Perhaps older than man himself!*

All this Bill took in with a mere glance. But the greater part of his attention was captured by the girl. His breath caught in his throat; there was in him an emotion that was like pain. He was lost in her compelling, other world beauty. She lay motionless, head resting on the glossy black pillow of her hair, a coverlet barely concealing the perfection of her body. Her eyes were closed. Her cheeks were tinged with the flush of life, her lips were scarlet as blood, set into a piquant, child-unhappy expression. But her breasts did not rise and fall. She might have been but a painting. She might have been merely a corpse—if Bill had not known instinctively that she was alive.

"No wonder," Bill heard himself saying in a low, crazily-wavering voice, "no wonder they think she's a goddess. Oh, Lord! I could worship her myself!"

"You do well to pray to your Lord," the Reverend John Stevens whispered, in acid *sotto voce*, "if such are your thoughts! What wickedness swells here? Who is this shameless creature? What is her purpose in stealing my converts?"

Bill felt a flash of irritation. "Boy! You sure take yourself seriously, don't you, Reverend? Shut *up!*"

Stevens' mouth opened and closed. He blinked and gulped. Reynolds, his assistant, said uncertainly, "See here, now—"

"See here—nothing!" Bill shunted himself a step closer to them, whispering fiercely. All his flippancy, his cocky acceptance of a dangerous situation, was gone. In its place was the deadly seriousness of a tough, quick-thinking reporter who sees a story beside which all other news stories pale to nothing.

"This is something that is bigger than you or me, Reverend Reynolds. And why? Because that girl is not a native of the planet Earth!"

"Not . . . not a native of . . . the planet Earth?" Stevens repeated the words in a tone of horror. Then his face grew very stern indeed. He leaped to his feet with a cry of anger. "Blasphemy!" he cried. "Impossible! My father taught me that God created Heaven and Earth and populated Earth with creatures made in his own image. Other planets are therefore lifeless, and the Lord did not intend man to travel between them."

THEN he apparently regretted his temper. The flame in his eyes died down. But he said sternly, "Do not interfere with my duty as a minister of the Gospel!"

And he whirled, and with long, plunging stride broke into the glade and confronted the drummers!

Bill van Astor-Smythe stood up, his hands on his hips in disgust. Talk about your fire-breathing sky-pilots! Here was one in the flesh. The drummers had leaped to their feet, gesticulating, jabbering wildly in the Kaffir tongue. But the Reverend John Stevens talked back at them, even more bombastically, and suddenly they began to cower, and then fell to their knees, their heads lowered. Bill heard them mumble meaningly, "OurfatherwhoartinHeaven—"

They went through the whole Lord's Prayer, and then, with wails of terror, ran into the jungle, apparently back toward their village. These oldsters were, Bill guessed, chosen solely to keep watch over the villagers' new object of worship when the tribal ceremonies did not include her.

"They realize their sin," Stevens said triumphantly. "Please come out, Mr. Astor-Smythe; Mr. Reynolds."

It was with a strange sense of eeriness that Bill stood in front of the space-ship, for such he knew it to be. The glorious creature who lay on a

couch in what must have been the observation booth of the ship was utterly oblivious of events—had been oblivious for how long? Bill shivered. The thick, glass-like material which sealed the girl in was scarred with long, white, gouged streaks, straight as a ruler—as if, perhaps, meteors moving at incredible speed had struck glancing blows, had left their marks. Inside, on the glass plate, were star-shaped hasps or locks which might have accommodated keys.

The girl was fairly visible, partly because of brightening moonlight, partly because of the rows of lighted candles in their candlesticks which had been placed on the ledge beneath the transparent partition beyond which she slept. Nonetheless, Stevens drew his flashlight, spot-lighted her upper body and head.

Stevens' voice was gloomy when he spoke. "A creature of evil and wickedness, verily; a temptress who, if she should wake, would be more dangerous than a serpent of the jungle."

Bill grinned. "Ixnay, fellows! Don't stare so hard at the young lady while she's in bed. It's unethical. Besides that, it ain't right!"

Thomas Reynolds flushed scarlet. His mouth fell in his confusion. "I was only trying—" he began in protest.

"We were trying to determine whether the—the creature really came from another planet," Stevens hastened to his aid. Stevens' own boyish cheeks were red.

Bill chuckled. "Save it, pals. I know what you were trying to determine—whether you'd have what it takes when she does wake. But never mind about cogitating too hard about whether she really came from another planet. Take one look at the ten-legged spider dozing in that web spun on the outside of the glass there. Hey! There's a whole half-dozen of them!"

IT WAS true. The spiders, if spiders they could be called, had woven their strands across the glass-like material, anchoring them in the sharp corners where the glass-like material melted in the hard metal of the ship. But they were *ten-legged* spiders!

"See what I mean?" Bill demanded tensely. "You won't find any ten-legged spiders on Earth. Spiders are *arachnida;* they have eight legs by definition. That proves this ship came from another planet. Somehow, the eggs got caught in the corners of this window, endured the cold of space and then hatched when the sun struck them."

The beam Stevens held on the girl shook, as if the entire philosophy of his life were being rearranged. He desperately tried to grab at a straw. "That —that spider up there has eight le—" He stopped, biting at his lips when the "spider," as if in answer to the challenge, moved in its web, and stretched out two additional legs which had been hidden beneath its body. He faltered, unable longer to question the argument.

Bill took the facetiousness from his voice. "Play the beam around the other parts of the ship, Reverend— Hold it! There!"

A vast excitement rippled through Bill's breast. Suddenly he had dropped to one knee, dropping his portable.

"Look at this!" he yelped. "A lever of some kind! Hey, man!" He whistled. "And if it isn't the lever that will wake up this girl and—or open up the ship—"

"How do you know?" the missionary asked sharply. He and Reynolds had similarly dropped to their knees. In spite of themselves, they had been infected by Bill's excitement over a chance discovery.

"I *don't* know!"

Bill wrapped both hands around the foot-long bar of metal which protruded from the base of the ship—the only such protuberance to be seen anywhere.

"But I'm almost certain of it!" Bill continued vibrantly. "Look here! This isn't a lever so much as a plunger. It was designed to be pushed upward. When the ship landed, it would force this plunger upward. But the ship, by pure chance, rested its aft section on the limb of that fallen *baobab* tree there. The plunger was prevented from touching solid ground. It obviously didn't fulfill its function when the ship landed!"

The Reverend John Stevens flicked the beam over the plunger. He said slowly, "And perhaps it was a good thing it didn't, Mr. Astor-Smythe. I have a conviction about that girl in there, and it is not a pleasant conviction — *Don't do that!*"

"It's already done," Bill said in satisfaction. It had required no more than a steady upward pressure to slide the plunger out of sight into the belly of the ship.

Bill glanced sidewise at Stevens, grinning. He enjoyed the look of striken uneasiness on the young missionary's face. Stevens, strangely, had an almost *religious* fear of the sleeping girl. How silly that was! Showed what happened to you when you were isolated from the rest of the world and had nothing but a Bible and a flock of Zulus to keep you company—

And it was at that moment that Bill heard the hissing sound! At that moment that he sensed terrible danger!

HIS eyes popped. Coming from invisible apertures in the hull of the ship he saw sudden streams of a yellowish vapor. He caught a whiff of it. It spread mortal terror through his soul as his brain went suddenly dizzy.

He leaped to his feet and back. He caught chaotic glimpses of Stevens and of his assistant, Reynolds. They had seen the gas too. Not only seen it, but —breathed it! They were tottering, staggering away from the ship, or trying to stagger away. But suddenly they fell on the ground.

Bill himself fell, futile, scalding curses leaping through his remaining thoughts. Stevens had been right. There was something hellish about this whole thing, about this ship, about this girl. Why had he ever had the bad sense to push that plunger up? It had obviously released a gas designed to slay any life near the ship! For Bill knew he was dying as he fell.

But as he fell, he saw the glorious sleeping creature stir—saw her limbs move in life—saw her lips part—saw her eyes open with awareness of an external world. He had been right. The plunger had been designed to wake her—and perhaps others of her kind within the ship! He groaned in abject horror of what he had done, and felt life slip away. . . .

CHAPTER III

Peace for the Planet Earth!

WHEN Bill van Astor-Smythe regained consciousness he knew with certainty that he was the captive of the people from the stars. He already was quite certain that the sleeping girl was not the only inhabitant of the ship. She would not have come alone.

Even as he lay there, his mind struggling out of its torpor, his bones like lead, he was reasoning his way out of confusion. Where had this ship come from? *Why?* Bill shuddered; for some reason he felt that if he had only listened to the Reverend John Stevens,

he could have averted a terrible catastrophe, which still lay in the future.

He did not regain full consciousness immediately. But for a lucid second, as through a blur, he saw three figures standing over him. Two were men, dressed in alien clothes. The third was the ravishingly beautiful sleeper who no longer slept. They were wearing strange helmets which looked like those used in football. Bill knew that such a helmet was on his own head, and on those of Stevens and Reynolds who lay on the floor of this room with him.

Between the helmets ran wires.

That Bill saw before he lost consciousness again. But he felt strange forces plucking at his brain . . . he felt his thoughts running with incredible swiftness over every memory of his life, and every forgotten memory, as if somebody were turning the phonograph of his mind at incredible speed.

Then he was awake—and being hauled to his feet!

"Men of the planet Earth!" an alien human holding a strange weapon snapped. "You will fall in between us! Mistress Bess will speak to you!"

Along with the dazed Reynolds and Stevens, Bill fell into line between two guards dressed in resplendent metal-braid uniforms. They were marched down an echoing corridor. They turned left into a lavishly draped room. And here sat Mistress Bess—the Sleeper!

Bill felt the same painful lump in his throat. She was so beautiful! Beautiful beyond the laws of nature.

They were brought to a standstill.

Studying them closely, the girl leaned forward, her brief silken costume spangled with diadem jewels that clustered in her hair like bright galaxies strewn on ebon space.

"Leave me, guards!" she spoke suddenly. "I do not require protection from those who are my friends!" Her hand came down as the guards bowed themselves out.

Mistress Bess smiled—smiled a voluptuous smile that was as kindly as it was subtly taunting. And suddenly, for no good reason, that smile enraged Bill.

His square jaw came out. "Friends? Like fun!" He snapped the words insultingly, his fists knotting. "If you call gassing us a friendly act, think again! Or maybe that's your idea of how to say 'hello, how are you' on your planet?"

He sneered.

Her eyes, gold-flecked, turned cold. She half rose on her chair. Then she sank back, apparently restraining herself.

"You speak rashly, handsome one," she spoke softly. But there was the sharpness of a razor beneath her voice. "But no matter. I am glad you have already ascertained that we have come from another planet. That is true. You must also realize that the gas which stole your consciousness was released entirely automatically, was designed only to protect us from hostile creatures when the ship landed, to awaken me and my officers and my thousand soldiers from their long long sleep."

"Soldiers?" Stevens was breathing hard. "And why do you bring soldiers to the planet of the Lord? Nay, do not answer! Already, the Lord my God has spaken the truth unto me." His arms flung up, and his voice was terrible as he fearlessly stepped toward the Mistress Bess.

He cried, "You are a scientific race, versed in the arts of the destruction of lives and property —*and you have come here to conquer the planet Earth!*"

THE cry rang through the gorgeously tapestried room, and for a moment it seemed to turn everybody into statues. Then Bill yelped in hopeless

disgust, "Oh, *nuts!* Come back here, you dam—you blankety fool!"

He stepped forward, grabbed the African sky-pilot's arm, and pulled him back. He turned to Mistress Bess.

"Sorry, Mistress Bess. He -ah—he knows not what he does—oh, criminy, he's got me doing it, too! I mean, he's got a fantastic streak a mile wide—and not a magazine stand within three hundred miles! I don't think you're any angel and I don't feel as if you're my bosom friend, see?—but I've got sense enough to know that nobody's going to try to conquer any planet with an army of a thousand men and only one measly ship! Sorry he blew up."

Her eyes were narrowed, and Bill thought he saw the trace of an ironic smile. He frowned—but at that moment the door opened. Into the room stepped the two men whom Bill vaguely remembered having seen just before he regained complete consciousness.

The taller of the two broke into a rapid, harsh flow of language. Mistress Bess spoke sharply.

"Speak in English, Bandro! These are . . . our friends."

The crescent eyebrows of him called Bandro shot up. There was a demoralized expression about his mouth. It was evident that some discovery had shocked him.

The smaller, stockier man at his side broke into less excited speech. "It is of no great importance Mistress Bess," he snapped. "Bandro is unduly alarmed, even though we entirely missed the planet for which we started!"

"What?" The girl cried the word out in shocked unbelief. "But . . . but yourself told me that there were no other solar systems with many light-years—hundreds, perhaps. That . . . that means that we have slept for—" dread drew the rosiness away from her cheeks—*"for how long?"*

The other's voice was somber. "Longer than we dare to think, my lady. But what matter? To us it was but the fraction of a moment. We closed our eyes and opened them as the plunger dissipated the gases in the ship. And the ship fulfilled its purpose. It has landed us, safely, on a planet populated by beings of our own calibre—beings whom we can—"

"Stop!" She cut him off. She was breathing heavily, her face ghastly. "No matter. It is as you say. We must thank our gods for guiding us to safety on a livable planet—"

"There is only one true God! You foul creatures of the devil –"

"Shut *up!*" Bill swung Stevens around again, his eyes blazing. "Get hold of yourself, you—"

"I cannot stand by and see my religion blasphemed," Stevens cried excitedly. "This—"

She who called herself Bess-Istra leaped to her feet. "Stop!" she cried sharply. "Will you have us throw you in chains, fool? I am not of a mind to tarry when there is work to be done—when there is a great need to be met!"

SUDDENLY a soft slyness tugged at her lips. She left the dais on which she sat, her bare, golden legs moving with silken stride. She stopped when a few feet removed from the three men. Reynolds, who had been standing a little behind his superior, had been staring with hypnotic fascination at Bess-Istra from the moment they had come into the room. Bill felt much the same, only worse. There was something about this girl which rang warning gongs in his brain, but at the same time she made him experience an emotion that was overwhelming—and frightening.

She said huskily to the Reverend John Stevens, "You wrong us when you infer that we could intend the conquest

of your planet—a planet where a God named the Lord rules. No! Our purpose is different—our purpose is kindly!"

"What—" The man named Bandro spoke sharply, but cut himself off, his mottled dark eyes suddenly lidding.

"Yes!" spoke Bess-Istra. Her breath came more quickly. "You know, men of the planet Earth, that we are now speaking your language. Does this seem like magic to you? It is not. By means of an instrument which we, in our language, call the *vothet,* but which is a great deal like the hypnobioscope invented years ago by one of your countrymen, we were able to transfer from your subconscious minds much detailed information."

Bill remembered the helmets. "Yes," he nodded. "You learned the language that way, then?"

"Learned," she said, "not only the language, but also much about the planet Earth. For instance the nations of your planet are at war, are they not?"

Bill's mind was brought back suddenly to a remembrance of the conscienceless hordes of Nazis and Nipponese who were bringing misery and ghastly destruction to the world.

She added softly, "And the Allied nations of your world have their backs to the wall, are fighting a hopeless battle, are they not? In the Pacific the Japanese are throttling you. In Italy, the Nazis are about to trap Allied armies. Your cause is well-nigh lost! In another few months, the democratic nations of the world will be at the mercy of beasts! It is true?"

And Bill knew it was true! Few men dared to believe that it was true. They fought on, refusing to believe they were already doomed. But this girl, from out of the deeps of space, could look at the whole picture without prejudice. She knew! And she—

He drew his breath in suddenly. A startled thought swept across his mind.

"You mean—?" he cried.

"Yes!" The glorious face of Bess-Istra seemed transfigured with an inner glow.

"Men of Earth," she cried, her voice a clarion peal, *"we who have come from space are going to stop the war and spread peace and contentment throughout the world!"*

CHAPTER IV

"—Beleaguered Isle of Madagascar!"

TO STOP the war!

The thought seized at the innermost cells of Bill's brain. He grew dizzy with it.

He was not a sentimental sort of person. He had deliberately hardened himself to witnessing misery and death in their worst forms. The possibility that these mysterious people from the stars, with their super-science, could bring to an end the conflict scouring the world free of every decent human thought, awoke in him a choking hope.

Did she mean it? Could she mean it? Or were her words a mockery? Was she truly the devilish creature that the young missionary thought her; that Bill thought her? No! To have the hope withdrawn would be too much to bear.

Bill swiftly looked at the other occupants of the room. He whom Bess-Istra called Bandro stood fork-legged, face impassive, but with his eyes lidding his secret thoughts. Near him stood the shorter, stockier being with the glittering eyes; he was looking at Bess-Istra, lips curled in a vain, meaningless smirk. The Reverend John Stevens' jaw was hanging; but it was Stevens who broke the pulsing silence.

The zeal of his religion was in his

eyes. Somehow he was standing straighter, somehow his eyes were flashing with a godly fire. But this time, Bill was thankful to see, no austerely dogmatic cry erupted from his throat. Instead, there an humble dignity to his words.

"Mistress Bess," he said humbly, "if I have offended you with my suspicions, I pray your indulgence. But I was wrong—wrong! I had thought you to be the devil's own, but this offer of yours, to free the world from a desperate, horrible tyranny — well, the thought can have originated in none but a good and true mind. I —"

Her gold-flecked eyes were gazing at him oddly. "Good and true?" Her eyes brooded, narrowed, as if she were struggling with a thought that stunned her.

"Yes, yes! For after all, and I quote: 'He who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love his God whom he hath not seen?' Mistress Bess, we are all children of God, though we worship him under other names; and so now, if your intentions are indeed what you say, I throw open my heart to you, I give you my love—"

"Ixnay on the ovelay!" Bill van Astor-Smythe sang out. He was grinning. "Cut it out, parson! What he means, Mistress Bess, is that your offer to save the world for Roosevelt and Churchill rings the bell with all of us! And how!"

His excitement overrode any restraint he might have had in the presence of a beautiful girl.

"You mean you actually could do it? Slap down the ears of those dirty yellow streaks? Drive Hitler and his bunch back to the last front?"

BESS-ISTRA still looked at Stevens, at his boyish, radiant face, his eager blue eyes; still looked at him, as if his words lingered in her mind. Then she returned her attention to Bill. She studied him. She began to smile. She threw an amused look at Bandro and the other.

"Speak to him, Sab-Hallo. Tell him of what we could do."

The stocky, broadshouldered man known as Sab-Hallo smirked. He addressed Bill, his glittering, self-pleased eyes holding Bill's as if in contempt.

"The *vothet*, the machine which taught us your language and something of your world, gave us a general picture of the war which is being waged on this planet. It is a devastating war, of course, but nothing to what we on our planet—"

"Sab-Hallo!" Bess-Istra spoke.

He bit at his tongue and cringed a little. He said humbly, "I was merely about to remark that on our planet, although we excelled in the arts of peace, our science was such that we had great and marvelous weapons stored away in secret places. These weapons we have brought with us in our epochal flight across the void. They are weapons besides which your artillery and bullet-throwing guns are as nothing; your airplanes, your battleships, your tank, your deadliest gases and bombs—these are children's toys. On this impervious, practically indestructible ship which I, Sab-Hallo, have constructed, we have weapons which can level whole armies."

"Yes." Bess-Istra took up the tale smoothly. "As we shall level and destroy the armies of those who menace the freedom of your world —"

"*No!*" Stevens cried the single denial, pleading in his voice. His arms extended. "Mistress Bess, we must not! If we are going to bring salvation to the world, can we not do it peacefully, bloodlessly? For if we bring the peace we cannot do it through hate. Justice is the Lord's!"

"Hold everything," Bill interposed swiftly. "Back down, Johnny! You don't look gift horses in the mouth—"

And Bess-Istra interrupted him, her eyes wide on Stevens and his outstretched hands. "Stay!" she commanded. She spoke musingly, "Yes, it can be done. Why—why, a bloodless victory!" The thought seemed to stun her.

He who was known as Bandro strode forward, his heavy metal-braid sleeves slapping against his smoothly muscled arms.

"But—but, Mistress Bess!" he burst out in what seemed like anger. "This has never been your manner—"

She faced him. Her lip curled. "Quiet, Bandro," she exclaimed. She smiled, tawnily, voluptuously, and her eyes lidded. "After all," she said in a softer, more yielding tone, "are not these our friends? Do we not desire to please them?"

For a long moment he returned her gaze. Then his anger dissipated and he strode woodenly back to his place.

"Very well," he spoke at last, into the silence that settled. His lips curled into a peculiarly crooked smile which made Bill shiver. "Do as you wish, my lady," he murmured, and there was a slight sarcastic tone to the words. "You have ever chosen to amuse yourself by strange means."

SHE whirled toward him, and the double-lensed pistol at her side was in her hand and directed toward him. "Mark you, Bandro!" she cried in a tone of rage. "Once before you stood against me—but I reinstated you, made you my second in command; forgave you. But your insolence cannot longer be brooked. Will you stand in the way of this great—ah—mission which I seek to undertake for the . . . the good of our fellow men?"

Bandro stood still, faint contempt in his eyes.

She sheathed her weapon with a sliding clatter. "See to it then!"

Abruptly, all passion was gone from her face. Bill made a mental note that here was a girl who might appreciate a good punch to the jaw at the opportune moment. Damned if he'd ever let her pull a gun on him! But in the meantime it might be more to the point to play along with her.

He kept his thoughts to himself, as Bess-Istra turned to him, her full scarlet lips pursed with what Bill knew was deliberate coquetry. Knowing it didn't seem to be any antidote. His heart beat painfully. And she must have guessed the emotions in his breast, for a half taunting light grew in her glorious, lidded eyes.

He said huskily, with just the shade of counteracting insolence that was necessary to set her back a trifle on her heels, "Okay, Bess! Where do we go from here? We've got a world to save! And every minute we stand here making with the gab somebody dies that shouldn't have to."

Her mouth tightened imperceptibly, but she immediately regained her balance.

"We begin where you, Bill van Astor-Smythe, say," she said coolly. "The *vothet,* as you may guess, is not powerful enough to cause all the information we drew from your brains to be impressed on our brains. The complete picture of world events is not before us. But you, being a—a reporter?—you would know of such things. Command me then, O Bill. To which battle-front shall we proceed—and shall we destroy, or merely render our enemy helpless?"

The Reverend John Stevens' eyes were shining with a godly joy. He grasped Bill's arm.

"Brother," he cried, "good tidings at

last sweep across the world. Peace and good will toward men is at last to be a reality. Praise the Loord! And may I make a suggestion?"

Bill was faced with a staggering decision. Where to start on this impossibly monumental task? "Go ahead," he invited dazedly.

"As a trial action," Stevens said glowingly, "why not save Madagascar and Mozambique from the damned Japanese?"

The idea caught in Bill's brain like tinder. He snapped his fingers. "Swell!" he cried. He whirled on the voicelessly watching girl, paying no attention to the ironic mirth in her barbaric, gold-flecked eyes; nor to the enigmatic half-smiles of Sal-Hallo and Bandro. He began to talk in rapid staccato fashion, outlining the plan that had come to him.

Across Bess-Istra's face flashed respect. "You would make a good strategist on my own planet," she murmured speculatively.

"You had wars on your own planet then?" Bill demanded, eyelids flicking upward, in the beginnings of startlement.

She momentarily seemed to bite at her lip. She said easily, "No . . . no, of course not. Many thousands of years ago, O Bill, there were terrible wars. But in the era in which I lived all was peace and prosperity, and men loved each other."

SHE flirted a casual look at Stevens. Stevens was so excited, Bill thought, that he would very likely blow a cylinder if some steam wasn't let off. This was his dish. An angel had come from Heaven who sorrowed for the woes of men and was magically empowered to put a stop to it.

Bill felt a faint thrust of alarm, momentarily. Something—what was it?—didn't seem quite right. Oh, nuts! His touch of malaria was making him nervous.

Bess-Istra now turned with a silky motion toward Sab-Hallo.

"The ship is ready to lift, all my soldiers are awake, and have eaten, and are ready to stand at their posts to receive orders to operate their weapons should we have need of them."

"All can be made ready within a few of those Earth units of time called the minute. But the only weapons we will need to accomplish our task are those I shall operate from the control room, Mistress Bess."

"Good!" Bess-Istra drew a sharp breath. Her eyes sparkled with an excitement that had suddenly drenched the very air. "Are we ready? Then to the control room, Sab-Hallo! Lift the ship out over the great sea which Bill says is to the east —and find the Japanese supply fleet which is at this moment sailing with munitions and reinforcements toward the beleaguered isle of Madagascar!"

CHAPTER V

Soft Belly of the Axis Dragon

"THERE it is!"

Bill was sitting in an acceleration chair, part of a semicircle of people who leaned backward and looked up at a broad white view-screen, which showed a perfect picture of the cobalt, white-capped ocean spread out below.

The ship, a mere thirty minutes ago, had leaped up into the sky with a tremendous burst of speed. And there was no acceleration! One hardly knew one was moving, for the acceleration chairs created an etheric field which robbed each atom of an accelerating body of its inertia.

Seated in the semi-circle were Bess-Istra, Bandro, the Reverend John Stev-

ens, and Bill van Astor-Smythe.

Thomas Reynolds had pleaded of his superior to be allowed to go back to the mission. He was a simple soul, and confessed that these strangely alien people frightened him. Stevens was glad to let him go, for the mission needed someone to tend it. Reynolds left the ship before it left the ground.

Bill was pointing to a fan-shaped area of white-caps now. It was miles below, but it was certainly the wake churned up by the Japanese fleet.

The space-ship plunged down out of the stratosphere toward its goal. Excitement plucked at Bill's nerves, sent the blood singing through his veins. Could these people actually do what they claimed to do? It seemed impossible!

He glanced sidewise at Bess-Istra. Her scarlet lips were parted with the same excitement Bill felt. She was watching the growing fleet with interest. Bill saw clumsy cargo ships with deep wells and thick funnels. There must have been a dozen of them, loaded with packing cases which were filled with enough munitions to keep the Japs on Madagascar and Mozambique going; would keep them supplied until the Allies surrendered.

The ships were closely bunched. Except for two destroyers they were traveling without convoy.

But as the space-ship dropped toward the fleet, there were signs of action. Sailors on deck went mad. And suddenly from each of the ships came flashes of fire and an appalling racket like continuous summer thunder. They were firing two-inch shells!

At the same time, the convoying destroyers stepped up their paces a notch, and from their funnels poured thick streams of smoke! At the same time the destroyers erupted with anti-aircraft fire.

Bill winced, knowing that no ship could stand up under that withering fire. But Sab-Hallo suddenly burst into a titter of delight.

"Pitiful!" he cried. "They think to harm my wonderful ship—seek to harm the ship which even fierce-driven meteors could not damage. The fools—the useless fools! Mistress Bess, say the word, and I shall show them the might of our planet—shall utterly destroy and sink their fleet with one blow!"

She bent on him a cold, withering glance. "Do so and it will be your lot to join them. Render them helpless and drifting—it is all I require."

Bandro now turned in his chair with the motion of a panther. He spoke in a low fierce tone, the dark furrows of a vast impatience over his brow. "Why should we spare them, Mistress Bess? They are trouble makers! They and their nation must be completely negated before our—before the plan can succeed! Before the peace can be consummated. Was it ever your manner—"

"It is my manner now!" She spoke slowly, as if puzzling over something. Then she shrugged. She smiled a hard, peculiar smile and snapped at Sab-Hallo: "Drop closer! Spew their ships from stem to sterns with the golden disks. At once, for there are things to do and this is a larger world even than that one from which we came."

"It is good, my lady," muttered Sab-Hallo, sullenly.

His deft long fingers touched at a control sequence on the console board—and Bill saw a beautiful sight!

GOLDEN disks, thousands of them, spinning rapidly, fell from the belly of the space-ship, swiftly approached the cargo ship directly beneath them. Bill heard the missionary give a cry of unbelief as those golden

disks spun through the decks and disappeared; touched at the chattering guns and seemed to be sucked into the metal of the guns.

And those chattering machine guns, which threw two-inch shells with incredible rapidity, ceased their fire—*jammed!* And at the same time acquired a brilliant golden glow.

And then the cargo ship, aswarm with panic-stricken Japs, began to lose headway. Smoke ceased to pour from its funnels. It lost speed.

But by that time, the space-ship had darted toward another Japanese craft, straight into its futile anti-aircraft fire. Again the golden disks spun rapidly downward—and again! Within five minutes after the space-ship had attacked, the Japanese weapons were entirely silenced, and the whole fleet was an aimless flotilla of flotsam!

A fleet unable to move under its own power!

"And Madagascar is two hundred miles away!" cried Stevens, pounding his fist exultantly, yet softly, restrainedly, on the arm of his acceleration chair. "Oh, this is indeed a great day for man!"

"But—but how did it work?" Bill cried, amazed. "Bess—Mistress Bess or whatever—"

She shrugged carelessly. "It was nothing. The golden disks were but magnetic force-fields which had an affinity for metal. They act as staples which bind the moving parts of a machine together so tightly that no force can sunder them. The Japanese fleet will float helplessly until after we have made the peace!"

"And when the Japs discover that those men and supplies they needed aren't coming through they'll know they can't keep on fighting," Bill breathed joyously. "They'll retrench, try to consolidate their gains. The Tommies will follow them up and hack them to pieces. Wow!"

He suddenly let out a yell that made Bandro leap to his feet with a curse that turned Stevens' face red, even though the curse was made in another tongue.

"Where's my typewriter? *I've got a deadline to meet!*"

Deadline!

And Bill van Astor-Smythe, legman extraordinary for the New York Corey Features Syndicate, made that deadline—and a hundred more infinitely more important.

Scoop after scoop! Scoops for which any journalist would give thirty of the ripest years of his life!

Bess-Istra, the glorious mystery girl from the stars, had smiled with indulgent patience at Bill that day after he yelled for his typewriter.

"Of course," she said smoothly. "You will want to let your people know what is happening. So be it! Bandro, lead our great friend Bill to a room where he can be uninterrupted."

AS BILL went away with Bandro, Stevens was talking with Bess-Istra, quoting eager reams of Biblical quotations, his face on fire. And Bess-Istra was listening with complete attention, an odd, thoughtful expression in her eyes.

Bandro turned with his hand on the knob of the door of the room to which he had brought Bill. A curious malevolence was naked on his face.

"I wish to give you a warning, friend Bill," he said when he had Bill's attention. "Do not look with too bold an eye on her who is known as Bess-Istra!"

Bill put his hands on his hips. "Hands off, eh!" he snapped. "Sez who? You haven't got a lease on the pretty maiden, have you?"

Bandro took three quick steps toward him, nostrils flaring. "Fool!" he sneered. "You will be caught in her toils like numberless others. Know you not that she is not what she seems?"

"Know you not that it isn't any of your business whether I do or don't know?—and quit talking behind a lady's back!"

They glared at each other.

Bill said, levelly, harshly, "Let's you and me get off on the right foot, Bandro. I don't like you. I never will like you. Get it?"

Bandro was voiceless. His gray skin grew dark. He at last said in a strangled voice,

"We will remember that, friend Bill!"

He turned, was gone, and Bill wrinkled his nose and said, "Nuts!"

Within less than a minute, he was attacking his typewriter in a very frenzy of creation.

He was halfway through his story when Bess-Istra entered the room. Bill ripped a sheet from his typewriter in a daze. He rose awkwardly, face flushed.

"Forgive me, my friend Bill," she said smoothly; "but I have gone to the trouble to make your story credible to the outside world. Are you yet finished with it?"

"A half-hour yet," Bill said dazedly. Then his eyes sharpened. He said slowly, "Yes . . . yes, of course, I will have trouble making my editor believe. But how have you—?"

"Finish your story," she cried. There was a warm, almost childish delight in her voice. "And then I will show you!"

Bill finished his story, but curiosity was rife in him. He read over the typewritten pages, and a huge grin of satisfaction spread over his face, which was beginning to acquire a reddish growth of beard.

"Boy!" He whispered to himself, lovingly stuffing the manuscript into one of the legal-size envelopes he kept with his typewriter. "Hot stuff!"

He looked up at Bess-Istra, wandering through the gleaming, instrument-studded interior of the great ship. She led him to an alcove where Stevens, Bandro, and Sab-Hallo were standing. Nearby, next to a slanting board with red buttons, a metal-braid clad soldier stood. Bess-Istra motioned to him.

He pressed a stud—and the entire side of the alcove fell away, letting in the daylight of the outside world; and as the gang-plank touched and was still, Bill cried out in unbelief.

The ship had landed on the roof of the New York Corey Features Syndicate Building!

BILL knew that was so because, two blocks away was the Empire State Building. Bill had often seen that gigantic structure from this roof.

But mostly he knew it because a half-hundred of the employees of the New York Corey Features Syndicate had surrounded the ship, yelling and running, and waving their hands excitedly.

Stevens' eyes were bulging. "New York City!" he gasped. He almost looked frightened. He had never seen any city bigger than Mozambique or Lorenzo Marques.

"By — the unholy — hinges of — Hell!" Bill said, spacing the syllables out. "What the—" But he got the idea. Nobody could fail to believe this story now—particularly with his editor standing in the forefront of the crowd over there, jaw hanging slack.

Bill burst into an excited roar.

"Mac!" he yelled. *"Mac!"*

He raced from the gangplank onto the roof; he grabbed the dazed man's hand, shouting senseless things. Then he thrust the manuscript into his hand.

"Print this! Spread it over the front

page of every newspaper that wants to pay a fancy price for a first-hand account of the saving of the world! I'll get you a story a day from now on, until it's over over there. And my percentage jumps from 60% to 80%! Okay?"

"Okay!" gasped the startled editor. "But—but what—that is—Bill—" He floundered.

"Save it!" he laughed joyously. "You'll get the whole story from that manuscript. Goo'bye!"

He turned, sped into the interior of the ship, and the gangplank soughed into place behind him. And a few seconds later, the ship from the stars hurled into the air toward "the soft belly of the Axis dragon" — toward Italy!

For, Bill had decided, there lay the next logical striking point against the monstrous forces that were throttling the world!

CHAPTER VI

Victory on the Second Front

BESS-ISTRA stood close to Bill. He could feel her bare arm on his as they looked into the view-plate. He wondered if she were doing it intentionally. It was doing things to his insides.

"There's Italy!" he exclaimed. "The real European Second Front. It was preceded by the battle for Tunisia. When the Allies won that, they had the whole coast of North Africa for a jumping-off place to attack Hitler; for North Africa was, in effect, an airplane carrier . . . a *big* one!"

Bandro stroked at his sharp-pointed chin. The ship was dropping slowly downward and forward, following the low mountain range that girds the west coast of the Roman boot.

"And the war strategy of the Allies—of your inadequately armed American forces?"

"They may have been inadequately armed from the standpoint of what you think is adequate," Bill retorted, disliking the insolence which Bandro at times deliberately put into his tones, "but from our standpoint we had the goods! *Had* it! But now the Americans and the English, three hundred thousand of them, are about to enter another Dunkirk!"

His face was pale with agony as he said it. He hadn't realized until he had listened to a newscast which Bess-Istra had picked up for him that the Allies were facing such a black future in Europe. Now they were dying like flies.

"As for their strategy, they hammered Italy from Africa with hundreds of big bombers, destroying port after port. But the Italian navy, commanded and manned by Germans, escaped and is loose in the Mediterranean. That navy played hell when we ferried men across the sea from Tunis to Italy. But the British navy chased them, and halfway up the coast of Italy, where the mountain range breaks, we landed our armies. For awhile it seemed like things were going good, but Hitler meanwhile was bringing in reinforcements from the Russian front and the Vichy French forces were drafted, too.

"The Allies, in the first week of fighting, completely drove across the middle of Italy to the Ionian Sea, cutting off all communications in the boot part of Italy. But in the next three months the Nazis proved too much for them. As things stand now the hard-fought for position in Italy will be entirely lost."

"The inhumanity of man to man," said Stevens hopelessly. "And after the war, what plan of action will keep

down the beast in man—keep it down forever?"

Sab-Hallo laughed a high-pitched laugh and rubbed his hands together. His eyes were gloating. "We shall solve that problem, too," he said throatily. "There are few problems that my genius cannot solve. "For instance, I have a—"

"Quiet!" Bess-Istra snapped. "Your genius will earn you an early death if you do not remember that I command you in all things."

"Very well, my lady," the squat, broad-shouldered scientist said sullenly. But Bill, watching him, saw a grim look pass between him and the perpetually sneering Bandro.

BESS-ISTRA gripped Bill's arm. Bill found himself looking deep into her barbaric eyes. And he knew they were barbaric. He knew that she was wilful, strong of mind, ready to temper, thoroughly spoiled — dangerous, maybe. And yet his attraction for her, deadly though it was, was growing, no matter how hard he fought it. And he knew that she knew it—for now there as a taunting mockery in the impertinent curl of her full red lips.

"And now," she breathed, "if we render the enemy army helpless, if we entirely destroy resistance, the Allies will be able to gain control of all Italy, will be able to depose this large-jawed man called Mussolini."

"And not only that," Bill said vibrantly, "but our armies will be ready to pour into Germany! For Hitler will simply be unprepared for this blow. He won't be able to muster his forces."

"So be it," she spoke coolly, and turned to Sab-Hallo. "When the mountains break, turn eastward until we come to the front where these gallant, Allies are dying. We shall destroy all resistance with the gas-ray!"

The ship hurled into a sudden speed and the sky without, arching over the post-card-pretty Mediterranean, blurred. And when the ship stopped, they were looking down at the battle—a battle that made Bill's blood run cold! He knew that never before had man seen such horror. Never had so many and such murderous weapons of artillery been gathered in one place; nor so many tanks; nor, if it were known, had men fought with such ferocity.

Although in this part of the world it was early afternoon, the only light was that furnished by frantic search-beams stabbing the sky for dive-planes; by cannon — mostly 155-mm. howitzers, Bill guessed, supported by 75s and 100s—which belched fire that was purplish-red like the blood of reptiles; by tracer-bullets leaping across devastated open spaces from hidden pill-boxes where machine-guns chattered.

No light, except from these weapons! For a black pall of smoke lingered from horizon to horizon.

But in that light, Bill saw great tanks spitting out their death at retreating Allied soldiers. Saw heaps of bodies bloodying that never-to-be-forgotten battle-field.

And then, as the ship from the stars hovered, he saw field artillery turned upward!

Bill was aghast. "Those damned Nazis are firing at us!" he cried wildly. "They'll bring us down before we can accomplish our purpose!"

And indeed, little puffs of light were exploding about and near the ship.

"No!" Stevens was pale. He stammered, without conviction, "No! The Lord is just. Though we walk in the valley of the shadow of death, he will not permit us to die when our mission is so great!"

"That God Whom you call the Lord,"

said Bess-Istra, and Bill for the life of him could not tell whether she was being serious or faintly sarcastic, "must indeed be powerful. For this ship is impervious to ordinary missiles such as those. Indeed, only the green ray of death and disintegration could harm it. Still," she added, apparently in deepest thought, "it does not seem probable that your God the Lord would have had the foresight to have created this ship solely for the purpose of defeating your enemies."

The Reverend John Stevens said seriously, solemnly, "But it may well be the case, Mistress Bess. He works in strange ways his wonders to perform."

There was an ironic, retrospective smile to her lips, and her eyes were lidded, as if they were gazing backward along the trail of memory. "Strange," she muttered, and her voice was curiously metallic. "A strange god indeed that does not bid its worshippers to strive arrogantly and impetuously, cruelly, for power. In my province, where I was born, there was a god who— But stay! This is foolishness. Sab-Hallo, on this Axis army which seems likely to defeat our friends the Allies, you will use the gas-ray! And use it until all their legions have fallen in stupid slumber, easy prey for the embattled Tommies and Yanks!"

THE gas-ray! In the next two hours, the two natives of the embattled planet Earth saw that alien weapon used with awful effect. Sab-Hallo touched a stud on the edge of the instrument panel. And Bill saw a soft, yellow-spangled cone of light flick downward toward that anti-aircraft battery which was pouring a solid stream of projectiles toward the hovering space-ship.

Almost immediately, the very air within a hundred feet glittered with internal atomic-explosions. Little motes danced prismatically, beautifully, and seemed to be sucked toward the humans —toward the Nazis who operated the gun. Swept toward them, was helplessly breathed in by them.

And they—*fell!* Fell on the ground by the tens. And then by the hundreds, as the beam flicked toward other firing units, and still others.

And an hour passed. Bill didn't know how the Americans and British felt, but he could guess. For all along that fifty-mile battle-line, a strange cylindrical ship was moving, and a mighty army, certain of victory, was being plunged into the maddest kind of panic.

The very air surrounding every enemy unit, every tank and fox-hole and pill-box, was turned to a deadly gas which dropped men like flies!

And the Allies, grim men in olive drab, were rushing in to consolidate those miraculously harmless positions. It was probable that they had by this time seen the ship from space, and knew it was responsible. It was also probable, that by this time, the news concerning the ship from space had already been printed in innumerable newspapers, and by this time was being broadcast over the radio. But Bill was too fascinated to pick up such a broadcast from Bess-Istra's tele-radio.

At the end of the second hour, Bill was weak and limp from excitement. "Thank God for small favors, Johnny," he whispered. "It's done! Can you imagine it? The biggest German army ever assembled in one spot—*and it's out of commission!*"

"I have already thanked God," the young missionary stated. "Nor do I think, Bill, that it was a small favor. What we have seen is the real beginning of the end. We can win no greater victory—for this *is* victory! Peace will soon come to the planet Earth!"

CHAPTER VII

The Capture of Adolph Hitler

AND never in the history of the world was a war ended so quickly and so bloodlessly!

MUSSOLINI FLEES ROME!

Aboard The Ship From The Stars, July 19—(CF)—Today an era ends. A Fascist tyrant who became the military tool of the most hated man in the world is in disorganized retreat from the seat of his hoped-for empire.

This morning I saw the complete conquest of the German army stemming the advance of Allied troops into Italy. That news has already been flashed to the world: how the gas-ray, the utterly strange weapon of another world, rendered the Nazi forces helpless; how the Allies, suffering from almost certain defeat, swept toward Rome on the tide of certain victory; and by late tomorrow, I assure you, will have spread their rule over all of Italy.

But at noon today, through the mysterious TELE-ray of Bess-Istra, I searched out Mussolini himself, saw him sitting in session extraordinary with his ministers. The session ended with a nerve-wracked man's complete nervous collapse. His ministers were little better off. I followed them as they ran from the chamber, took a private car for the airfield, where they board a transport plane.

They are in that plane now—bound for Germany, like dogs running home to their master!

"And where shall we attack next, O Bill?" inquired Bess-Istra. The faint insolence on her lips lingered as a taunting reminder to Bill that he was playing with dynamite merely by standing so close to her.

As the planet Earth might be playing with dynamite by accepting her favor?

He broke off the momentary thought with a deep shudder that shook his very soul.

In answer to her question, he spoke again, gutturally: "To the Russian front!"

And to the Russian front went the ship from the stars. Went there—and left again within an hour and a half. And behind it was a German army of soldiers whose eyes were suddenly blank with lost memories.

Guns dropped from their hands.

They wandered aimlessly on the blood-drenched ground south of the River Don.

Half-track tractors hauling 155-mm. howitzers, captured from the Russians earlier in the war, continued to move—but their bearded, unutterably bedraggled drivers gazed stupidly at the controls until the engines of war crashed into a tree or rolled down into a culvert and turned over.

Tanks kept on going, witlessly, until they turned over, pawing at the air with their madly clanking caterpillar treads.

Artillery ceased to fire when gunner crews sat down on the ground and picked preoccupiedly at their nails.

Transports crossing the Baltic loaded with men stopped after awhile and drifted, for the black gang no longer remembered such things as coal and engines and boilers; and the captains on the bridge merely stood and looked dumbly at the bluish fog that rolls on the Baltic swells. . . .

And later, along the German-fortified west coast of Europe, men also turned dumb as from the ship of Bess-Istra came a high-frequency vibration that short-circuited mental synapses; or were stricken into unknowing slumber as the gas-ray got in its work.

From the north the Russians came.

From the south, the American and British Allied forces. And from the west, Great Britain launched an invasion of France and Norway; and met no resistance.

Three armies swept toward Berlin as internal revolution broke. . . .

The day of Adolph Hitler was over.

And the day of Hirohito!

"ASIA offers no greater problem," spoke Bill van Astor-Smythe grimly. "Japan has bitten off more than she can chew in China. China is not conquered—hardly occupied. Oh, the cities and villages and hamlets have been taken along the coast, and far inland. Chungking has fallen. *But*—holding a city doesn't mean that you hold the land surrounding that city! There are the guerrilla fighters who rule the open spaces between the cities, who harass Japanese troop movements and communication lines and have given the Japs quaking nerves. All we have to do is to render the Japanese of those cities powerless so that the native citizens and the guerrillas can overthrow them. But—well, but how?"

Bess-Istra drew her dark brows frowningly down toward her gold-flecked eyes. "Well?" she demanded. "Sam-Hallo—how?"

The squat scientist's wide-set eyes held hers with a studied impatience. He said acidly, "There is no problem, if we but sweep such cities with psychotic waves that will set Japs and Chinese against each other, and provide ample advantage for the guerrillas to enter and take command."

She took a step toward him, her hand falling to the gun at her hip. She said tonelessly, "This war will be ended so that we do not kill either friend or enemy, Sab-Hallo!"

"*Friends!*" the scientist cried, sweeping the Reverend John Stevens and Bill van Astor-Smythe with a scathing look. "They are not your—"

"Cease, Sab-Hallo!"

The command did not come from Bess-Istra, but from Bandro. The tall man's eyes were flashing with anger. He thundered at Sab-Hallo, "It is not your place to question our mistress! She is right, of course. We shall bring peace to this planet—peacefully!"

The fire died from Sab-Hallo's broad face. There was a moment of silence while his eyes searched Bandro's. And Bill could have sworn that something flickered between them, some understanding. What?

Sab-Hallo's shoulders fell in resignation. "Very well, Mistress Bess," he said smoothly. "I have a weapon which will vanquish these Japs so that the guerrillas can come in without chance of harm. The fire-ring!"

By the end of that day, Bill had another story to write.

From the belly of the ship, as it hovered over a village, a swiftly expanding fire-ring was hurled; much as a smoke-ring is puffed from the throat. This fire-ring grew, both in size and in brilliance—and it dropped over the Jap-controlled village as a cowboy would drop a noose over a running horse's head!

And like the noose of a riata, the fire-ring began to contract.

It contracted slowly. Bill saw shopkeepers come bursting from their doors in mad excitement as the ring rolled along the ground toward them; saw Japs, darting through the streets, Japs who knew that this was another strange weapon released from that ship which had paralyzed their allies in Europe.

There was panic in that village. The ring swept through solid structures without harm, rolled on its way unimpaired. Neither Chinese nor Japs

dared to get near that ring, nor to hurdle it. Consequently, they were all huddled in the center of the city in a tight knot, unable to flee anywhere.

The ring came on; some Chinese leaped in it—without harm! But before others could follow their example, the fiery ring contracted to its center, rolling through the huddled people—and winked out.

Apparently nothing had happened.

BUT something had. For suddenly the vastly more numerous townspeople attacked the Japs, probably feeling that since this was a weapon, it had been used for their benefit. And they were right. For as the Jap soldiers attempted to fight back, their guns did not fire!

The ring of fire's only function—but a powerful one—was to eat up and to entirely dissipate a chemical without which gunpowder is *not* gun-powder; the ring had simply destroyed all the sulphur in that village!

By the end of that day, fire-rings had been looped over Shanghai, Hong-Kong—and Singapore. . . .

Outnumbered Japs were swarmed over, made prisoner, and a liberated Asia started to go mad with joy. And in Tokyo, when a shining, cylindrical ship floated with the nonchalance of complete confidence over that city, high officials realized that the game had run its course. The members of that diabolical society known as the "black dragon" committed hara-kiri down to the last man.

In Australia, Japanese morale was broken, and the army which had gained a foothold on the north coast retreated with dreadful losses, and that same day was utterly destroyed when the transports on which they sought to make their escape were sunk by American B-24's.

In Java, the natives rose in one savage wave of revolt and swept over their hated conquerors. The French East Indies again raised the French flag.

Bill directed Bess-Istra in this supreme undertaking that enveloped the whole world, and literally knocked from under them the legs of the would-be totalitarian conquerers of the w o r l d. And now, as a crashing finale, he made his last suggestion, which Bess-Istra indulgently acted upon.

In Tokyo, an utterly black beam speared down from the belly of the ship, plunged through the roof of a building decorated with hideous gargoyles, sought its way down through level after level, and touched a man cowering against the wall; swallowed him up, so that there was no trace of him.

The beam snapped to another corner of the city, sought out another toothsome, wrinkled yellow man; similarly swallowed him.

The ship snapped halfway around the world in the small part of a minute. Down the black beam dipped; again, again, and again! Plunged into the very heart of the council chamber where sat a fat, cruel man, and a slim man, and a man with a large jaw, and a man with a lock of hair hanging down over his ghastly pale forehead. And others, of lesser import. These the beam swallowed.

And in a chamber in the ship, after they had been materialized there, after they had been drawn like formless gases upward through walls by the black beam, were more than a dozen men.

All important leaders of the Axis combine were prisoners of Bess-Istra!

CHAPTER VIII

Mistress of Earth

IN SPITE of the fact that Bill had been in on the ground floor of a real

miracle from heaven, he was stunned. So much had happened in the last few days that it was beyond the imagination to comprehend.

The war was over!

"The war is over," Bill repeated blankly. "Johnny! Did you hear me, boy?"

"Eh? Eh? Oh, yes!"

Bill's typewriter played a slow, stuttering tune, and then went like mad.

"The folks at home don't have to feel like fifth-columnists if they drink more than one and two-tenths cups of coffee! Boy! They don't have to steal extra lumps of sugar from restaurants. Huzzah! There ain't any more of Tirpitz' subs snaking along through the seas. They gave up the fight yesterday when they heard about Hitler. Poor, poor Hitler! Come here, Hitler—giffs candy und ice cream. Come here—and I'll smash your face in. But you ought to be glad *we've* got you. You ought to be glad you ain't in Berlin, what with the Tommies swarming all over the place. Hmm. Same goes for Tojo and his thugs. Too bad about Laval and Quisling. They couldn't take it—Johnny, I heard that over the *tele*-radio. Laval and Quisling picked out some real high buildings and jumped; *squerrooch!*" Bill laughed a little bit insanely. He picked at his nails with his teeth, staring at the typewriter as he tried to finish a story that would be radioed to his syndicate by Bess-Istra's equipment.

He didn't hear any answering laugh from Stevens, though.

He turned around. His jaw fell. *"Johnny!"*

"I think I can do it," Stevens whispered. His chest rose and fell. He panted, "I *know* I can!"

He jumped up and wildly paced the length of the room. His eyes were wide and staring, his lips were working over each other in a highly nervous exaltation. Bill gulped, shook his head, blinked.

"Hold it! What gives?"

"I can do it," Stevens whispered.

"Do what?"

"I can convert Bess-Istra!"

"Convert—" Bill yelled the word out, and then sank back, feeling as if the world were coming to an end. He leaned forward and bared his teeth:

"Why? Why in the name of God do you want to convert her? She's got her own religion. She's got her own system of theogony. She wouldn't want to be converted!"

"Oh, yes, she would!" Stevens whirled. "And why would I wish to convert anybody except in the name of God? We have been commanded to go to all corners of the Earth and preach the gospel—"

"This isn't a corner of the Earth! It's a God-forgotten piece of a planet which existed so many years ago you can't think it."

"Nothing is God-forgotten. Particularly Bess-Istra. She proves it by listening to me. By asking me about the Lord. She never tires. Bill—Bill—" Stevens' voice suddenly stopped; a stricken look appeared in his eyes. His lips shook and he bit at them. He sank down on the three-legged chair, hands between his knees. "Bill," he whispered. "Bill—*she is so unutterably lovely!*"

BILL started to say something, and the words jammed in his throat. He jumped to his feet, holding his head in his hands, taking three long strides to the other end of the featureless room, then whirling and confronting Stevens with pity in his eyes.

"You poor hopeless idiot. You're in love with her!"

Stevens looked up and there was

nothing but a blurred pain in his ingenuous blue eyes.

"I am," he choked miserably. "I am!"

"You fool! She's been leading you on. She's no more interested in your creed than that sneaking Bandro and Sab-Hallo. She likes the idea of twisting you around her little finger. She likes to pull guns on people. She likes to kick them around. There's nothing good and true in a carload of her. Convert her? Don't make me laugh. Johnny—" He paused in pained, hopeless exasperation; and then whirled as he heard a voice behind him.

"It is interesting to know in what light you regard me, O Bill!"

Bill started to speak; then clamped his lips. "You heard me," he said brutally, his glance hard on Bess-Istra.

There was cold fire in her eyes. Her skin was white as marble, and her voice bit like shattered glass shards.

"I will remember that, Bill!" she grated. "I will remember that though I have freed your planet from a terrible bondage, you feel no gratitude. You feel that I have an ulterior motive instead."

A hard, accusing little smile wrinkled the corners of Bill's mouth. "I've been playing my cards as I got them, Bess-Istra. Playing them for all they were worth. And letting the finesse take care of itself. Unfortunately, I can't finesse. I've been having fun up to this point—but after this— Well, Bess-Istra—" his voice ground out the words "*—just what is your motive?*"

"You've freed the world, you've stopped a big war, you've got the trouble-makers locked up tight. Fine. Swell. That's what you promised to do. But how come you came to this planet in a ship loaded to the gunwales with the instruments of war? How come you left your own planet at all? Who are you? What comes after this? Don't hand me that line about us being your friends. You've been playing a little game and having a lot of fun—like giving candy to children. Only maybe the candy will give us a tummy-ache!"

Stevens' hand bit into Bill's arm. But all he could do was to shake his head miserably.

The color had entirely left Bess-Istra's face. Every muscle in her body was visibly tensed. Her shoulders literally shook when she spoke; and her voice jangled horribly.

"You will regret that, Bill. You will understand how you have misjudged Bess-Istra—some day! Know then, that in a few minutes from the control room of this ship I shall broadcast a message to the peoples of Earth, a message which will clear everything else from the air, a message which will sound from every open receiver in the world!

"The peoples of Earth shall soon know my intentions with regard to them *—and so shall you!*"

TWO of Bess-Istra's mechanics fiddled in the interior of the *tele*-radio which filled one side of the control room. Monstrous *blurrup*-ings came from the machine. Bill knew that the ether waves of Earth were being cleared, every station in the world literally scoured off the air by a controlled-static.

Then the transmitter was ready!

Bill stood silently, his heart a stone in his breast. What would Bess-Istra say? Would she prove herself to be what Bill thought her—or what he wanted her to be?

Bess-Istra stepped in front of the grating that would receive her voice.

Her glance passed over Randro, in whose mottled dark eyes Bill saw a hard, watchful eagerness; and then to

Sab-Hallo, who stood with arms crossed on his barrel-chest, face expressionless, yet sardonic.

Lastly, Bess-Istra looked at Bill. At the icy rage in her glance, Bill flinched; but his jaw came out, and he managed to show some of his bitter cynicism in his own eyes. Slowly her lips tensed, and with a pantherine motion she twisted savagely to face the "mike." She made a motion to a nondescript man, her announcer:

"Peoples of Earth, listen! Peoples of Earth, Bess-Istra, your benefactor, shall speak to you—*now!*" The man's deep voice rolled out over the world; then he stepped aside, and Bess-Istra spoke:

"I am Bess-Istra! Know my voice, now, peoples of Earth, for you shall hear it often. I came from the stars, and found a planet in thrall, wrapped in the toils of a monstrous war, cruelly beset by creatures whom you call Nazis and Japs; creatures whom I believe to be scarcely human. Seeing this, I at once set about freeing you!

"And now you *are* free!

"Already, by listening to the many broadcasts which fill the air-waves, I can sense the mad, hysterical joy which has taken possession of you. The war is over! The enemy is humbled, and everywhere Allied soldiers—the gallant Tommies and Yanks and Aussies and Canadians and Filipinos and Senegalese and Fighting French and innumerable others—have flowed into the conquered areas. The morale of a bewildered enemy has been hopelessly shattered. There will be no more resistance!

"These things you know. These things your great Churchill and Stalin and Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-shek have already told you.

"*But*—but, Peoples of Earth, already I sense a new conflict growing amongst you. It is not yet evident to the senses of any but one who is able to look upon the situation without prejudice—myself, Bess-Istra! I see a new monster rising amongst you—and that monster is—indecision!

"What shall you do with your world, now? What shall you do with the conquered peoples? How will you rebuild? *Who* shall acquire *what* territories? *What shall you do with Hitler?*"

BESS-ISTRA'S voice dropped a tensed note. Bill stiffened, a sudden hollow fear growing in his mind. What was she saying? What was she planning to do?

As if she knew he was asking the question, Bess-Istra's gold-flecked eyes locked with his, filled with a taunting, controlled rage—that was directed at Bill. Then she spoke again, almost hissing the words out, they were so clearly articulated:

"These are the questions that will rise amongst you, and cause an ill-feeling that may never be erased. Therefore, peoples of Earth—" the girl from the stars drew a deep breath that shivered the clustered diadem of jewels on her breast, "—I am going to solve these problems for you!"

Bess-Istra's arm raised high, and she cried, "Peoples of Earth, know that I, Bess-Istra, now take control of the planet Earth! Know that I am your new ruler; know that I, with my irresistible ship, having freed you, now take my reward: People of Earth, your planet is—*mine!*"

Bill never knew what happened. Not much of it, anyway. His brain snapped. Broke. A purple flame shot sky-high across his vision. Perhaps he screamed. Perhaps not. But suddenly he found himself face to face with Bess-Istra, his hands outstretched like claws. He vaguely saw Bandro leaping toward him. Saw Sab-Hallo's jaw fall.

And then saw Bess-Istra step back one step, pulling at the gun on her curving hip. Bill knew it was the spastic gun, which could kill so completely. He didn't care. He tried to get the gun, and the gun raised, and behind him he heard the Reverend John Stevens crying, "Bill! *Bill!*" in an agonized voice, and then little lights winked in the gun . . . and Bill fell!

Fell, knotted up, brain scalded with burning thoughts, and traveled interminably through a warped tunnel of pain.

And was sharply unconscious.

CHAPTER IX

In Captivity

HE CAME out of it, fighting, yelling, squirming with an unbearable nightmare. Hands were on his arms, strong arms held him down. He relaxed. His eyes snapped opened. The drawn face of the Reverend John Stevens looked down at him.

"Bill!" Stevens choked. "Oh, God! You were right—*right!* She never had the good of the world in mind at all. She just brought peace to the world so that she could take over more easily!"

His face was twisted with the unmatchable pain of young love betrayed.

"Courage," said Bill. "Stiff upper lip. And all that sort of thing."

His thoughts were colder than dry ice. And as brittle. He could speak normally, and flippantly, and he could sit up now, locking his arms around his knees, sighing bleakly, and looking around at their prison. A dark prison with a grated door stingily admitting checkered light from the corridor lights outside.

His lips settled into a savage humor. He locked eyes with Stevens.

"You lost your head, too, Johnny?"

"Yes! I couldn't stand by—and after all, I was so bitterly—so bitterly disappointed." He could speak no more and bowed his head.

Bill grasped his arm in a single strong, comforting squeeze. He shook his head slowly back and forth, in profound amazement. "We should have known, Johnny. Boy, were we the uckersays! Why didn't you stick to your guns? You thought she was a devil in the first place, until—"

"Until she told us she was going to bring peace to the world," Stevens whispered hopelessly. "I didn't think—I didn't have any reason to think there might be another purpose behind it, Bill. She—"

"Skip it. I was almost taken in myself. I *was* taken in, I guess. But I was so enthusiastic about ending the war, that I sort of figured we'd get that out of the way, get the world to perking happily again, and then somehow we could deal with Bess-Istra, if she was as dangerous as I thought she might be. And—" suddenly he was biting at his lip "—and I guess I was hoping that maybe she wasn't that kind of a gal. I was hoping that—well, I guess I was hoping that she could be—converted . . ."

Stevens looked up swiftly. His touch on Bill's arm was impulsive. "Bill," he breathed. "Bill, you're in love with her, too!"

"What? Huh? *Say!*" Bill's lips curled in a black snarl. He jerked his arm away as if Stevens were contaminating it. "Don't give me any of that, you hopeless idiot! Why I couldn't any more fall in love with that—that —"

He stopped, paled. Stevens was regarding him with the sad smile of a man who is very, very wise.

His shoulders fell. Slowly, as if the burden of his thoughts were weighting

down his head, his eyes sought the floor and stared blurrily at nothing.

DAYS, slow days, passed. Their prison was little less than an oversize cage deep in the bowels of the ship. There were toilet facilities, two low couches with silk coverlets, and two acceleration chairs.

The latter were of course useful. Frequently, a little red light winked on above the door, accompanied by a sharp, warning bell. Then Stevens and Bill would get into the chairs, and when the ship moved, the acceleration would not hurt them.

The ship was going places and doing things. Where and what?

Questions thudded dully in Bill's brain. Bess-Istra was making herself the world's ruler, undoubtedly, consolidating her power. But what was she going to do with the world? How? And what was she going to do with Hitler? *Make friends with him?*

What was she going to do with those murderous Japs and Nazis? *Treat them like brothers, because maybe she was like them?*

Bill jumped up, paced back and forth along the length of the room, chewing at his nails. By God! He knew what he'd do with Hitler, the damned, sneaking, foul-minded bit of human filth who had brought misery and starvation and death and humiliation unbearable to millions of innocent people. Or did he know? What could you do to him? What punishment would fit the crime?

The question was as maddening as those questions concerning the ends of time and space.

Maybe you should just kill him cleanly, get him out of the way, and to heck with punishment and red tape; Hitler would be dead.

Now Admiral Tojo! There was a guy! His punishment was simple. And very slight and not to be feared by such an admirable guy. Douse him in gasoline, touch him off with a safety match or a chromium plated cigarette lighter, and chase him up and down the street. Jap soldiers did that to the Chinese, and if the poor Chinese could take it, that Admiral Tojo certainly could—

"I'm going nuts!"

"You are taking it too hard, Bill," Stevens said in distressed tones. "If you would—"

"If I would sit down and pray! I'll leave it to you, Johnny! But I want some information. If only that guard who brings us our food would talk."

"Perhaps he does not know the English tongue."

"Nuts! I'm telling you he does. So does every other soldier that Bess-Istra brought along from that damnable planet of hers. Bess-Istra had Bandro or Sab-Hallo put one of those helmet things on and transfer his knowledge of the tongue to a soldier who in turn taught others in the same way, and so on. Sure, they know the English language. 'Cause why? Because Bessy is going to use them in ruling the world!"

The red light above the door suddenly winked. The warning bell rang. Bill hopped into his acceleration chair with a curse. Stevens followed.

They sat there for a few minutes. Then a blue light glowed, and a piping whistle sounded. The ship was motionless again. And where were they?

Who knew? They might even be out in space.

THEY weren't, though. Two weeks passed, two weeks of maddening inactivity to Bill. He was essentially an active type, active of body and mind. Neither found profitable exercise in that cage. But at the end of those two weeks, there were double footsteps in the corri-

dor without. The guard swung the door open, admitted the person with him, and then closed the door with a bang, and rested a slim shining weapon in the grating, pointing it accurately at Bill while he faced—Bess-Istra!

His heart went out to her, impulsively—until he remembered. Her beauty, her lips which he felt could have been tender, the quality of strength, feminine strength that was wholesome, deep in her eyes, evident in her firmly set jaw, the glorious perfection of her body that was meant for the arms of a husband—these things he must ignore. He must remember only what she really was.

"Well?" said Bill. "How's your little planet getting along? Did everybody scrub his teeth this morning?"

"It is late at night, Bill."

"I should be sleeping then. Guess we'll go to bed so our company can go home. Good-night!"

Her eyelids flickered. She said, in a small, tight voice, "Bill, I have come to you because I need your help."

He said dryly, "Uh-huh! What's the matter? Did Hitler escape? Or have you toadied up to him? Maybe you two would make a good pair."

He could have cut his tongue out as soon as he said it. He noticed now that there were dark circles under her eyes; noticed lines of strain about her mouth. But she said nothing to the accusation.

"Hitler," she said, "is being tried along with all his friends and Axis partners at a newly-formed World Court—tried in what is known as the democratic manner. And every German and every Jap and every Italian who ever performed an atrocity on any innocent person, and against whom any evidence can be found, will similarly be tried."

"You don't say!" Bill suddenly began to feel slightly crazy. "And where did you get that idea?"

She frowned at him. "It was a promise made by the President of the United States long before I came to the planet of your God the Lord."

"I told her about it," Stevens broke in dully.

"Well!" said Bill. "Well, well, well! Let me get this straight, Bess-Istra. Are you the ruler of the world?"

She studied him with eyes that suddenly grew alive again with insolence.

"This planet, O Bill, is mine!" she cried. "And I *am* its ruler. I am the supreme head of all governments. And the heads of those governments are merely figure heads who must take orders from me, must abide by my decisions, on pain of punishment."

"Have any of them," Bill asked with a twisted smile, "failed to cooperate with you so far?"

"No! They dare not. They know my power. They have transmitted my orders to their inferiors. The battle fleets of the world, O Bill, are now in dry-dock under my orders. They are being scrapped—scrapped down to the destroyer. And that scrap is being used to supply industry. And all the aircraft of the world are being scrapped also."

BILL eased himself into the acceleration chair because he felt he had to sit down. He tapped on the arm of the chair for a long moment before he spoke again. His face was a study.

He said, "Doesn't a prosperous world need ocean liners—passenger planes? Couldn't those battlewagons and bombers be converted into commercial vehicles?"

Her hands were on her hips in scorn. "No! There will be no antiquated means of transportation on my world, Bill. Hereafter, trade shall be carried on with huge transports which work on the principle of light-thrust—the same principle that impelled this space-ship across a void unutterable. Nor will I

tolerate the outworn mode of currency. Already, an international currency which I have devised with the help of certain well-known economists is in the first stages of development.

"Already, false trade barriers such as tariffs have been outlawed. And the geography of the world is being rearranged, Bill, according to racial groups, to languages, to traditional backgrounds. That continent which you call Europe will be divided into nine distinct nationalities—only nine. Each country will be of sufficient strength, possess sufficient natural resources, that it need never fear an aggressor nation."

"Boy!" said Bill, looking askance at her. "You sure do walk where angels fear to tread! Or maybe they haven't walked there because they couldn't. Too much red tape. But the dictator tramples over many conventions, eh?"

And she said serenely, "I have accomplished many things, Bill. I am remaking the outworn social pattern of the planet of your God the Lord—remaking it according to what I conceive would be His wishes."

Bill was staggered. He could have been no more winded if somebody had jolted him in the stomach. He didn't believe it. It was beyond the realm of common sense. She was a lying, cheating hell-cat, and anybody with a grain of brain should know it. So why didn't he jump up and tell her off?—in spite of the almost childishly pleased expression she wore?

He couldn't! He was going to be a fool and fall for it!

Nor could Stevens. Nor did Stevens want do. Stevens was like a man who suddenly sees the sun where there had been only palling cumulus heaps.

"Mistress Bess!" he cried, his face radiantly transfigured. "You mean you believe—you believe in that which I have told you?"

For a moment there was a flicker in her eyes. Then she nodded solemnly. "Yes! I believe—I believe in your God the Lord! The principles he lays down seem very efficient."

Stevens tried to speak, and choked up. Bill got embarrassed.

"Okay, okay, okay! So she believes!" He was inwardly fuming, alive with cynicism. He blazed, "Skip it! Let's get down to bedrock, Bess-Istra. You came here—why?"

"For your help."

"What kind of help?"

HER eyes dropped. Her fingers twisted together. "The readers of your column in many newspapers have been clamoring for your return, O Bill. And I wish you to return. And this time, I wish you to dwell on—well, to dwell more on me as subject matter, instead of the great things that I do."

Bill's hands went to his hips. He laughed a short, barking laugh. "A press agent!" he cried scornfully.

"Yes. I want you to write me down as one who loves his fellow men."

Bill sneered at Stevens. "Hi, there, Abou ben Adam!" He turned back to Bess-Istra. "But why do you need somebody to extol your virtues when you've already squelched a man-sized war? The people probably worship you, don't they?"

"No!" A bleak dread grew in her eyes, a humid mistiness of sudden bewilderment. "Bill, somehow there is a traitor in my own camp. A traitor who is giving information concerning me to the newspapers. Who is trying to turn the people of the world against me. And who is succeeding!"

"Because," Bill snapped, piercing her gold-flecked eyes clear to the roots of her brain, "it's true?"

"True? True?" Her eyes took fire. "Of course it is true—but the people

misinterpret. They do not realize—"

Bill wearily ran his hand through his crisp dark hair. He shook his head in long helpless arcs. "And I'll wager that Hitler is screaming his head off right now in that World Court, saying that people don't understand! Nuts! Listen, Bess-Istra!"

He took a stance, his face hard.

"I'm going to take that press agenting job—and I'll turn out plenty of guff for the world to slop up. But lay off the Pollyanna act when you're around me. Don't go out of your way to show Johnny and me how religion changed your life—because you know and I know that it didn't! Get it? Okay. Let me at my typewriter!"

He started toward the door.

And Bess-Istra struck him. Lashed at him with the full force of her palm. Brought him to an utter, confounded standstill.

"Beast!" she cried. "Pig!"

She kicked him in the shins, at the same time raised her hand. The door opened. She stepped into the corridor. She turned and spoke ragingly to Stevens: "Come, Johnny! There are more truths that I would learn from you concerning the ethics of your religion."

She moved down the corridor, tiny bells on the hem of her short garment jangling to the rhythm of her step.

Stevens stared after her like a man shocked. Then he went out the door —like a moth that is soon to be devoured by the flame?

Bill stood there, fists knotted.

"Do that again, Bess-Istra," he vowed very softly through his teeth, "and it gives—*murder!*"

CHAPTER X

Treachery

AS THE weeks, the months passed, Bill van Astor-Smythe was glad that he had taken his job—for *Bess-Istra literally changed the world!*

Changed it, utterly remade it!

Sab-Hallo, the squat scientist, was put in charge of industry. Soon, all airplane plants and shipyards were turning out great transports which moved by the unique principle of light-thrust. Were engaged in manufacturing small, one-man "gliders," which really weren't gliders at all, but motorized craft on which the driver lay at full length.

New methods of mining were introduced. A new kind of power-machine was developed which harnessed free energy formed by the rotation of Earth's magnetic field through space. A weather machine was tested by Sab-Hallo, and was turned out in large quantities. There would never again be famine on the planet Earth! Climate could be controlled!

All over the world the illustrious change took place. China was reborn, as modern industrial machinery flowed in to take the place of laboring coolies. And the Chinese did not suffer because the machines took only a few minutes to do what formerly took hours; their standard of living was simply raised, their leisure time increased. And so it was, over the whole world.

Bess-Istra ruthlessly discarded outmoded systems of government. Expensive and useless bureaus were dispensed with.

The world was rebuilt. A new London, glowing lustrous, raised on the ruins of the old. Scorched earth was treated with chemicals that made it productive again.

Bess-Istra, seeking for some means to keep order in the world, created an International Police, with Bandro as the Chief Officer. The thousand soldiers she brought with her were recruited for their duties in this organization. On

the breast of each was the symbol of Bess-Istra—the blood-red scimitar. And as the Scimitars was this International Police known.

Bill didn't get along with Bandro; nor with Sab-Hallo for that matter. He didn't trust either of them. He didn't like the idea of those two having so much power. Bandro and his Scimitars could be a terrifically dangerous power in the world!

Bill mentioned this to Bess-Istra. But he didn't get very far with it; an hostility existed between him and Bess-Istra which, while it never broke out, yet existed, like a slumbering volcano.

Sometimes Bill was convinced that Bess-Istra hated him with violent passions, still remembered his denouncement of her. At other times, he was almost inclined to believe that she sought to get under the hard shell of indifference in which he clothed himself when she was around; was tender, almost yielding. At such times it was hard to restrain himself. He was convinced she was a devil girl from the stars—but sometimes his desire for her was almost overwhelming. And he hated himself for it.

BILL watched the actions of the Reverend John Stevens with a smoldering eye. Stevens now was pastor of the largest church in Washington in his denomination! His fame had apparently been such these past weeks that he was offered the post. But in between times, Stevens was apparently trying to convert Bess-Istra to his faith.

"Grow up," Bill said wrathfully. "You were practically a kid as far as brains went when I picked you up in the jungle. Now that you've gotten loose in the world, you're running wild. Falling in love with that—!"

"But—but she—"

"She nothing! I'm beginning to get an idea about that gal. Think it's religion that's making her remake the world? Nuts. One of these days we'll all wake up and discover that we'd be better off if we were still peacefully making war with Hitler. Oh, I'll keep on playing the game, and being fairly happy, and I'll let myself be lulled into security just like everybody else. But after that—" He slid his finger pictorially across his throat.

Stevens helplessly shook his head. "Bill—Bill there can be nothing deceitful about her. I know!"

"Hmm." Bill was morose. "Wait until things begin to crack—you'll change your mind."

But in spite of these occasional black thoughts, it seemed to Bill that Utopia was on the way!

He marveled at it openly, convincing himself all over again that Bess-Istra was on the up and up. But Bill knew that he was somewhat responsible for these brightening prospects. His articles swept the world from pole to pole. He turned out reams of material in which Bess-Istra was the utterly desirable heroine.

Bess-Istra visits the poor and promises the world that the era of poverty has come to an end!

Bess-Istra takes to her sick-bed after an exhausting conference with the great men of the world—a conference which will cure more of humanity's woes than all similar conferences of the hundred years just past!

Bess-Istra is offered a screen role by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the offer turned down because Bess-Istra wants to serve her people!

To Bill's credit, most of the items were basically true. But sometimes he distorted them to a sob-sister angle. And he knew that her popularity was becoming enormous.

Even a dictator such as Bess-Istra

needed the support of the people.

But—and it was like the ominous clang of a muted cymbal—someone was trying to undermine the good will the people felt toward Bess-Istra! Articles concerning her past were being published openly. Bill suspected that Bandro was behind it; but he said nothing.

And one day, with an appalling rush, the dam of events—*broke!*

Bess-Istra faced him that day and said grayly, "I will not suppress the news, O Bill, because this is a world of free speech! It is a democratic world."

"You're a funny one, Bess-Istra," he snapped. "You're a dictator, with unlimited power. You rule a planet that is alien to you. Yet you act sometimes as if you actually give a damn about the people of this planet, when anybody with any sense at all knows that the only love which impels you is the love of power! Just as the articles which some papers print accuse you of a base love of power, and reveal events on that other planet which must make you cringe. Why *don't* you stop those articles? I would if I had the power. I'm interested in making people love you!"

THEY stood facing each other in the lavishly colored suite of a white plastic building from which Bess-Istra administered the affairs of a world. Bill was dressed in a cellu-suit which looked and felt like nub tweed, but as a matter of fact it was a certain grade of paper. Bill had paid one unit of currency for it, which amounted to about sixty cents of the old money. Tonight Bill would throw it in a boiler and run the suit down the drain and tomorrow would put on another suit.

There was nothing humble about Bess-Istra. She carried herself with an imperious dignity, carried herself like a ruler. But more than once she had taken Bill's outright insults without more than a hardening of her perfect lips.

"*Do* they love me, Bill?" she grated.

"Naturally. But would they if I didn't play you up as a goddess in your own right?"

"Yes!" She blazed out the word, taking a step toward him. "They would see beneath everything, and would know that I think of them. Johnny knows, O Bill! It was he who showed me the light. It was he who— Oh, Bill!"

He was amazed to see the hot emotion drain from her glorious features; amazed to see the flood of tears that washed suddenly from her eyes. And somehow, he would never know in what manner, he was very close to her, enough to feel the warmth of her body, to see the throbbing pulse in her creamy throat. Her eyes were half-closed, and her lips were up-raised.

Bill was held rooted, with a hopeless passion. Oh, damn, and damn! Why did things have to happen this way? She was an alien woman, and God only knew what alien thoughts might go on in her mind. What was her purpose in acting like this? Or was there a purpose?

"Oh, Bill," she whispered, and a sob caught in her throat, "only you do not know—you and Bandro and Sab-Hallo, who think me wicked!"

Who thought her wicked? And why not? Hadn't Bill read about her struggle for power on another planet? How she had enslaved millions, geared them to a world order meant to satisfy her every whim?

And yet—Bill ground his teeth on the paradoxical thought—on *this* planet she had so far exhibited none of that cruelty!

He looked down at her parted lips, at her face that was wrenched by a kind of childish misery. He knew, with

horrible knowledge, that it must be as Stevens said—that he was beginning to love her! Beginning to love her in spite of the fact that she had toyed with the affections of her arch-enemy, the prime minister of another planet, who had overthrown her; in spite of the accusations made against her in anonymous newspaper articles that she had—murdered! In spite of her conquest and enslavement of the people of another planet, so that she might satiate her base lust for power!

He groaned abjectly. It was useless. She was like a child, bewilderment of some kind eating acidly at her soul. Some alchemy had taken place in her, and she was altogether lovable—

"Bess-Istra!" he choked humbly. "Oh, Bess—Bess—"

His hands closed about her soft shoulders. He drew her fiercely toward him, crushed her lips to his—or tried to!

AT THE last second, he sensed with awful foreknowledge her treachery —her deceit! Her eyes opened widely. A laugh tinkled from deep within her being as she thrust herself away from him, took a stance a few feet away, her whole mien changed to one of living scorn.

"Fool!" she said. "Utter fool for believing you could capture the love of Bess-Istra! Now you suffer. From the first, you had no kind word for me —treated me at once like one who is to be spat upon."

She burst into a wild laugh while his face was drenched in a ghastly whiteness that was like the color of a corpse.

She thrust up a quivering arm, and her gold-flecked eyes flashed with savage passions that he had never before seen there.

Her voice grated:

"You are a strong man, O Bill, and cynical beyond your years. You have never known real pain, the pain that I have known—when I was a slave-girl in the Temple of Stuz, and the priests of cruelty reviled me as you have reviled me. But now you will know pain—pain that will endure in you forever—"

Bill strode forward. "The pain that endures in Johnny Stevens, witch," he blazed, outraged beyond reason.

He would have killed her. Would have killed her though she had drawn her ever-present spastic gun; for, as he advanced, with his hideous purpose written clear on his face, she fell back one step, two. He heard the controls of the spastic-gun, deadly weapon, clack around; knew that Bess-Istra had set the gun so that destroying vibrations would lash out.

And yet she did not pull the trigger!

Bill would have killed her, for on her face was written her inability to spray him with those deadly vibrations—her inability to murder in cold blood. He advanced on her like Colossus—but stopped dead still as a tittering burst of laughter lanced through the lustrous, glowing room.

The tittering of scientist, Sab-Hallo!

Bill had a flash of intuition, for his consuming rage must have made him super-sensitive. His nerves twanged with an abrupt dread.

He whirled; even as Bess-Istra whirled in the same direction. And both faced not only Sab-Hallo but—a full dozen of Bandro's International Police, each of whom held to the ready a squat black weapon trained squarely on Bill and Bess-Istra!

CHAPTER XI

Johnny Stevens, Sky-Pilot

"REMAIN still, or you die immediately!"

The squat little scientist's voice lashed out, filled with smirking undertones.

Silence held. Bill was rooted. At last came Bess-Istra's voice, robbed of moisture.

"What means this, Sab-Hallo? Disband these Scimitars at once! Know you not that I will flay you alive if your purpose be what I think it?"

But Sab-Hallo laughed a deadly little laugh.

"The days when Bess-Istra may wreak her will on others," he said venomously, "are—*done!* The days when Bess-Istra may misuse the glorious science that I, Sab-Hallo, have prepared for her, are—finished!"

His broad face writhed suddenly with an unnameable passion—perhaps of hate. Then it was quiet again.

"You know why we overthrow you, Mistress Bess," he said into the silence that seethed inside Bill's temples. "For we *are* overthrowing you. Often we have asked you—demanded of you that you treat the people of Earth as a conquered race must be treated. You spurned us!

"The troublesome ones who lead the Axis armies still live! *Fah* for such inefficiency! The very nations which harbor the seed of future rebellions against us continue to exist. Germany and Japan must, and shall be—destroyed!

"And now, Mistress Bess—in a few moments, you shall see how I and my confidante, Bandro, conduct a trial—*not by the democratic method!*"

"Bandro!" The word broke from the lips of Bess-Istra. Shocked bewilderment was on her face. "Bandro, who told me of his love! And you, Sab-Hallo, whom I rescued from a wretched hovel and brought to greatness. Traitors! Traitors both!"

"Traitors," he agreed, and his laugh tittered out again. "But from this moment on, the planet Earth is ours to do with as we please! Technician-Scimitar, adjust the television controls to the interior of the World Court where Hitler is being endlessly tried for his deeds!"

THE Technician-Scimitar broke from the massed group of International Police, approached the *tele*-radio. In another moment, there was revealed on the screen a picture of the interior of the World Court, where the villainous men who had started the war were being tried.

There was no audition, merely sight. And Bill saw Hitler. The little man was seated at a table beneath the judge's platform. It was only one of many times that Bill had thus seen Hitler, and he looked woodenly at that despicable face.

It was a mass trial, and seated near Hitler were others of the same foul breed.

"Watch!" Sab-Hallo broke out softly. "Watch! The moment draws near!"

At various entrances to that square, extravagantly guarded court-room were heavily armed International Police, with the blood-red scimitar, symbol of Bess-Istra's reign, on their shirts.

Bill knew that no faction, with the possible intent of rescuing the Axis leaders, could break into that court-room.

And yet he had the conviction that something unscheduled was going to happen.

Something did!

Bill heard Bess-Istra gasp, saw Sab-Hallo's broadening grin as every Scimitar in the courthouse sprang to attention, threw open the doors, and admitted other hordes of Scimitars! They came running down the aisles and onto the rostrum where sat the dozen men

who had betrayed the world.

And at their head was—Bandro!

The courtroom was in pandemonium. But Bandro raised his hands, and shouted out a few sentences. The International Police drew their weapons and menaced the crowd, which had become evidently hostile.

And Bandro stepped toward Hitler and the others, and without warning drew two weapons, which he trained on them.

Bill found himself panting with dread. "Don't," he cried in agony. "Don't do it!"

"But he shall," ground out Sab-Hallo. "It is the only way to dispose of trouble-makers—the democratic way is outmoded! The people of Earth will soon learn that!"

And suddenly it was over. Mussolini, Goering, Tojo and the Japs, Hitler must have realized the terrible fate in store for them. Their reactions were different. Some continued to sit, frosty-eyed. Some clattered to their feet, screaming, cowering. And as livid red bursts of flame poured toward the arch-traitors from Bandro's viciously held guns, Bill caught one glimpse of Adolph Hitler before he vanished in a puff of thick, oily smoke, saw his screaming, hideously distorted face—distorted as if in the last moment of his terrible, terrible life he suddenly understood, with a bright awful clarity, what he had done. . . .

Smoke rolled away and where *they* had been was only formless vacancy.

The scene flicked off. Bill turned dumbly toward Sab-Hallo.

"What good will it do?" he asked through parched lips.

And Sab-Hallo drew his own weapon, a smaller variety of the flame-gun which Bandro had used.

"The same good," he said viciously, "as it will to rid the world of my Mistress Bess and of—you!"

BESS-ISTRA looked at her former pawn without visible reaction. Bill knew what her thoughts were. It was evident that by giving Bandro charge of the International Police, she had literally given him control of the world. The International Police in the World Court had acted according to a pre-arranged plan.

Bandro and Sab-Hallo had held out to them rich prizes in wealth and in power; had promised them a world to loot; while Bess-Istra had insisted on keeping her soldiers to the rigid law and order demanded by democratic rule.

Bill knew whose side he was on!

But how was he to overcome this cruel, conceited toad of a man? This Sab-Hallo, who had probably been responsible for those articles intended to undermine the faith of the people in Bess-Istra?

Bandro, in spite of Sab-Hallo's declaration that Bandro was merely his pawn, was very likely the real leader of the movement, and was merely using Sab-Hallo. But Sab-Hallo had to be taken care of first.

Bill knew in his heart that it was hopeless. Even now, Sab-Hallo was about to depress the trigger, and all the glorious beauty that was Bess-Istra would be gone forever.

Bill van Astor-Smythe knew it was suicide to charge the squat scientist, but in him was the hot necessity of at least fighting and dying. Merely to die was not his idea of dignity. His muscles tensed, and—

He never jumped! For his eyes suddenly raised to the great window at the far side of the room, a single invisible pane of glass which melted into the walls, and through which he could see the Washington Monument. And driving straight toward that pane of glass

with terrific speed came one of the strange, other-world gliders that Bess-Istra had introduced to this world.

On it came, and there was a man spread-eagled on it on his stomach, shielded from the slip stream by a conical, fanning guard of cimarite.

On it came, at such an angle that neither Sab-Hallo nor his men could see it!

Crashed through the window, sent shards spinning in a thousand directions!

And from its nose as it halted above the heads of the whirling Sab-Hallo and his men, came—the gas-ray!

In a moment, the men who had menaced Bill and Bess-Istra's life had fallen unconscious. Sab-Hallo alone was not caught. He swore lividly, vanished out the door.

The glider landed at the far corner of the suite, where the two rescued people had run to escape any possible gas.

And the Reverend Johnny Stevens, quite literally a sky-pilot, jumped from the glider!

CHAPTER XII

Jungle Retreat

"*JOHNNY!*" Bill's relief vented itself in a scream. "You old son-of-a-gun, why didn't you come two minutes sooner! I almost fried of dight. I'm as white as a wheat. I mean wheat as a sheet—"

"Never mind!" Stevens cried. "Sab-Hallo has escaped. He will bring others. We'll be pursued. Oh, quickly!"

Bess-Istra lost no time in taking fullest advantage of a critical situation. She was onto the glider, strapping herself to one side of the broad metal center piece. Bill strapped himself beside her, and Stevens, with complete lack of ministerial dignity, threw himself atop them, grabbed the U-bar, plunged it home, and twisted it.

The glider rose like a shot, whipped around, and flung itself through the shattered window, and in another moment was boring its frantic way through the atmosphere five miles above solid ground!

The escape had been made; but death would soon be on the trail.

IT WAS not cold. It seemed as if there were warm air-currents, of normal atmosphere pressure, surrounding the strange ship. Both the warmth and the pressure were generated by the very speed of the craft's flight through the thinner air.

"A ship!" Bill suddenly cried, twisting his head around to look into the backward distance. "We're being pursued! Johnny, where are you taking this crate?"

And Stevens replied, shouting above the wind, "We're being chased, and he who chases us thinks to destroy us. And there is only one place in all this world which I truly call home."

Bill grinned widely. "Mozambique! Portuguese East Africa! Your mission house!"

"Exactly. The house of the Lord. The Lord is my shepherd and he has led me into strange pastures, but now I am returning." His face, that had seemed so young, so freshly naive, now seemed inexpressibly — and sadly — older. He said austerely, "Brother—sister—the Lord our God will protect us, will fill us full of divine faith. We cannot lose."

"Hmm," Bill said, in a vaguely skeptical tone, as he saw that the furiously driven craft which pursued them was scarcely three miles distant.

Stevens explained to Bill how he had come to know that Sab-Hallo and Bandro were plotting the downfall of Bess-

Istra, were going to depose her without so much as a struggle.

"As you know," he said sorrowfully, "my proximity to the adventures which have so changed the world have given me considerable notoriety. I was offered the largest church of my faith in Washington—"

He stopped as Bess-Istra raised her dark head and smiled tawnily. "Because I, Bess-Istra," she stated, "asked that you be offered such a post!"

"You!"

"Yes! Already I know what you are about to tell me, O Johnny. Many Scimitars attended your church. Scimitars who knew of the plot that was brewing against me! It was I who suggested that they attend the religious services with which you worship the Lord your God. A suggestion is—a command! And I knew—"

"And you knew," Bill exclaimed, "that probably at least one of the Scimitars would get religion and blab to Johnny about the plot! Snappy thinking! But—well, it almost didn't work out."

And Stevens nodded soberly. "One of the Scimitars who discovered the wonderful light of the Lord told me that you and Mistress Bess were to be slain shortly. I came as quickly as I could—"

AN HOUR of driving speed followed. Below them, the shadowy outline of Florida was lost in distance, gave way to ocean as they fled out over the Atlantic. And behind them came not only one, not only two, but three of the slim, wickedly constructed light-thrust ships used by the International Police.

Death was on the trail!

Bill looked sidewise at Bess-Istra. She lay flat on her stomach. Her gloriously tinted features were calm, fully controlled. Again Bill felt an overwhelming tenderness for her—until he remembered her deceit. Then he wanted to throttle her. He ground his teeth.

Bess-Istra spoke after a long silence. "I do not think we will be able to escape from this with our lives," she said calmly.

And Stevens ground out, "We shall! We must! The peace and happiness of the whole world is at stake, Mistress Bess! Under your rule, mankind was truly progressing to a promised land. Under that of Bandro and Sab-Hallo—I shudder to think of what horror will be perpetrated!"

And as if his faith truly preserved them, they made the Portuguese East African jungle, swooped down to a landing just as the three craft following them had gained to less than a thousand feet behind!

They were forced to land in that sea of foliage because from the nose of the foremost craft a cone of light was emitted.

"The green ray of destruction!" Bess-Istra panted in a dreadful voice. She unstrapped herself from the glider. "Oh, quickly! Do as I say. The green ray will be swept over this entire strip of jungle, killing all insects, all animals, all organisms of any kind. And it will kill us unless you come very close to me—for I have a *bik!*"

"A *bik!*" cried Bill. "But I thought there were no *biks* on this planet, that there was no protection against the green ray!"

"I brought but one *bik* with me from my planet. One that I had hidden in the Citadel where I was driven by my enemies."

It was the first time she had ever made truthful reference to her past life. And Bill was amazed to see starlet tears on her lashes. But he knew now was no time to waste trying to solve this

enigmatic girl. He saw clutched in her hand a tiny round metal object from which small studs protruded. She plucked at the studs—and part by part, the round ball expanded until it was a full foot in diameter, flat, however; in appearance in seemed much like a loop antenna.

"Come close," she cried, and the two men immediately moved toward her until their bodies were touching warmly. She held the *bik* between them. "It will draw the energies of the green ray much as a lightning rod draws lightning. There is only the difference that the *bik* will store those energies—and if it receives too much may explode and tear up a full mile of jungle! There! *The green ray!*"

SHE pointed with her free hand—and Bill's blood froze as he saw a light-thrust ship sweep over the massed jungle foliage, from its belly coming a thick green beam.

There was a roaring awful sound as the beam swept through the jungle scarcely thirty feet distant. And Bill immediately smelled roasted flesh—the roasted flesh of hapless creatures of the jungle.

"Missed us!"

But the ship overhead, though it could not have seen the three fugitives in this equatorial gloom, was thorough. It criss-crossed overhead at tremendous speed until it seemed that the only spot in that locality that had not been touched was that where they stood huddled.

Bill hoped fiercely that the green beam would miss them. He didn't trust the *bik!*

But suddenly he knew the ray was going to touch them. It swept toward them, walking on one livid leg through the jungle. Ghastly sweat grew on his forehead; he felt Stevens and Bess-Istra tense. And then the ray was on them!

They were bathed in intolerable brilliance. The *bik* leaped with fire. And then the beam was gone—and they were alive!

After that, Bill no longer feared the ray. Seven times it swept over them before the last of the three ships which had pursued them disappeared. Then Bess-Istra dropped the *bik* to the ground; a *bik* that was crawling with energies titanic.

"We must leave—and quickly!" Bess-Istra whispered. "We have no instrument which can discharge the stored energies in the *bik*. If it explodes before we are far enough away—"

The glider rose with its human load after a long, agonizing minute of preparation. It flitted slowly between the branches of squat baobab trees. They could not rise above the jungle, because they had no assurance that their enemy did not still linger. But the explosion, when it came, literally caught the glider up and threw it high into the air.

Stevens brought it out with frantic effort—just as it was about to crash. Ghastly sweat streamed from Bill's face as the glider again floated along, smoothly. Three human beings, the hope of the world, were safe and alive!

And hope ran higher still, when Stevens brought the glider to a smooth landing in the lonely courtyard of his jungle mission.

Shock awaited them, however. Thomas Reynolds, Stevens' assistant, was dead in the little kitchen. Around the mission grounds were a number of Bantus, also dead. Bandro's ships, not content to take chances, had swept their green rays of death over this whole section of jungle for miles and miles around. All bird, reptile, insect, and animal life had been snuffed out; prob-

ably there was no human life within a day's journey.

"Damn Bandro!" Bill whispered with bitter, tearless rage.

CHAPTER XIII

The Translation

THE days passed swiftly. Bill knew they dare not leave their retreat—not yet. For Bandro was thorough and might be on the lookout.

But by means of the *tele*-radio built into the instrument panel of the glider, they kept track of world events.

And current history was truly in turmoil—hideous turmoil! Bandro had taken over the world with a vengeance. His International Police constricted over the world like a net. Thousands upon thousands of Japs and Nazis suspected of having performed war atrocities were executed summarily.

"Goodby democracy," Bill gritted. "When we abolish the trial system, no matter how heinous the crime, we abolish our whole way of life. Bandro may be doing a good thing by killing those people off. But he's not doing it for that reason. He's doing it because they might be trouble-makers."

Bill and Bess-Istra were alone before the *tele*-radio. Bill turned, surprised Bess-Istra with a tear sliding down her cheek. But it was not a tear of sympathy. It was a tear of humiliation and outrage.

"Someday," she whispered, "someday when I regain control of my world again, I shall throttle Bandro with my own hands!"

"I doubt," Bill said cuttingly, "if you will ever rule Earth again, Bess-Istra."

She whirled on him. She stood in a feline crouch, and from long force of habit, her hand fell to her weapon.

"Do not say that!" she cried.

"I'll say what I damn' well please," Bill told her, striding toward her. "You've pulled a gun on me once too often, lady. I was prevented from doing anything about it last time. Now it's different. *Give me that gun!*"

He wrenched it from her, threw it across the room. She burst into a strident scream of rage, flung herself at him with raking claws. He bent her wrists back, finally grasped her bare shoulders, held her rigid with steel-hinged hands.

He bit out, "You lying little beast! Actions speak louder than words. By desiring to kill Bandro you put yourself in the same class as Bandro. You've deceived me and you've deceived Johnny. All that guff about your believing in his religion!"

Her eyes grew big and round. The rosy color drained from her perfect cheeks. She whispered chokingly,

"I believe in your God the Lord!"

"*Our* God the Lord, you should say if you meant it—which you don't!"

"Our God the Lord, then!" she blazed. "I believe in Him. I have modeled this planet according to His wishes. The people of Earth were knowing perfect peace under my rule."

"You're still dangerous for all of that, Bess-Istra!" His gaze on her was hard and penetrating, searing into her soul with pitiless knowledge.

She completely lost control. She screamed rackingly, kicked with her legs. He held her off, swearing bitterly under his breath. At last he spun her around, slammed her against the wall.

"You have remodeled Earth by theory," he panted, "not because you *feel* that what you have done is right. Superficially, you admire the God of this planet. He is something new to you. He offers a new method for you to gain power—to gain power through a selfish type of kindness. But in-

wardly—in your heart of hearts—*you still worship the diabolical, merciless Goddess Stuz!*"

A MORTAL pallor swept her face.

He sneered bitterly, "Yes! I know your history, Bess-Istra. I picked it up from bits you or Bandro or Sab-Hallo or some of your men let drop. And got plenty of it from some of the articles written against you. You were captured from your birthplace when still a child, were raised as a slave-girl in the Temple of Stuz. You were spat-upon, reviled by the very priests of that cruel religion. Instead of hating the Goddess Stuz and what she had brought upon you, you commenced to worship her yourself—believed that in cruelty lay power—in selfish barbaric willfulness lay true contentment. And so the spat-upon slave girl began to plot how she could conquer her planet. She met Sab-Hallo, whose resourceful brain invented weapons that ravaged the planet, put her on the throne. Unfortunately, her prime minister did not worship the Goddess Stuz -and so, Bess-Istra, your own armies and weapons were turned against you, and you had no protection! You fled. But you still worship Stuz!"

Bess-Istra looked at him with horrible fascination.

She said, "The Goddess Stuz must be dead—it has been so long ago—and there was new a God here—a strange God—and," she added in husky voice, "a wonderful God!"

Her breasts woke to life. She panted. She cried, "I no longer worship Stuz the cruel—I love the true God—but I must kill you, O Bill, for your arrogance!"

She came like thunder and lightning, nothing more than a beast alive with terrible emotions. Bill was borne backward, shielding his face. Then his mind grew crystal clear. He threw her off balance, and while she teetered, struck her with savage fury with the flat of his hand.

She staggered back. Bill knew nothing save unutterable impatience, that was like madness. He had never struck a woman before. He would never strike another woman again, ever. But he struck Bess-Istra—punishingly, once, twice, thrice.

SHE slammed back against the wall.

She looked at him through animal-dumb eyes, a painful confusion sweeping her face. Her legs gave way. She slid down along the wall. She crumpled up on the floor of the room, head buried in her arms.

Bill stood over her, panting.

Her body shook, soundlessly. And then with sobs. Long, racking sobs of a woman who knows an agony of mind that will never end.

Bill's voice shook violently when he spoke. He heard it through an avalanche of pounding blood in his own head.

"I shouldn't have done it, maybe. But I'm glad I did. I would have wanted someone to do it to me if it would help. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you—see? That's the Golden Rule. It embodies all tolerable religions in one form or another. The Goddess Stuz didn't know about it. And so you can't be blamed for your past on that other planet. Those people are dead anyway—dead and forgotten ages ago, along with Stuz. *But you know that Rule now, Bess-Istra!*"

After awhile her sobs quieted, but she still lay there, head buried, wilted like a plucked petal. Bill left, biting at his lip. Already he regretted his action. It would do no good. Bess-Istra was Bess-Istra. Unchangeable, evil!

An hour later in the mission yard the

Reverend John Stevens quickly approached. Bill had been pacing up and down, scowling.

Rapture was on Stevens' face, a look of glorious fulfillment.

"Come!" he whispered. "Quickly! You must see this!"

They stood in the door of the chapel where black, fuzzy-haired African natives had worshipped a God that was new to them.

Bill shook. Kneeling at the altar, head bowed to floor level, silent and white and unmoving, was Bess-Istra. They watched her for many minutes. Finally she rose and moved down the aisle toward them. She faced them. The hard, selfish lines about mouth and eyes were gone as if they had never existed.

Her expression was so exalted, so filled with tenderness, that Bill was embarrassed. He knew without asking that Bess-Istra was — *changed!* Changed inwardly. She looked at him with a serene confidence and understanding that made him squirm.

She touched first Bill's, then Stevens' hand.

"My dearest friends—Johnny—Bill —I see things with such a different light, now. So different. We must soon make plans to loose the world from the terrible bondage that has been put on it by Bandro. We three alone. Even though we sacrifice our lives, it will be well worth it if man is made free again."

Stevens looked after her with the pride of a pastor in his flock; in his glowing eyes the light of a man in love.

Bill said softly, "Damn! Can you tie that?"

Bess-Istra's head was held high as she walked across the dusty compound, toward her room in the tiny south wing.

"Damn!" said Bill. *"She's got religion . . ."*

CHAPTER XIV

A Desperate Gamble

RELIGION, she had! An illustrious alchemy had taken place in her mind, and base metal was changed to gold. Her tears were real and pitying when the next shocking news came over the *tele*-radio.

Bandro sent scores of his ships filled with International Police over the cities of Tokyo and Berlin. And those ships, using every awful weapon known to that strange science, utterly killed every man, woman, and child in those cities! Utterly destroyed those cities until they were less than smoking cinder heaps!

And then proceeded indiscriminately to kill and destroy every living thing and every man-made object within a hundred miles.

Directly after this news was purveyed, Bandro spoke to the world; Bandro, dictator of Earth!

Bill was filled with revolted horror of the arch-murderer as he appeared on the television screen.

Of the silently sneering Bandro who had apparently been so subservient to Bess-Istra there was nothing left. Here was a man who was strong with the ferocity of a killer whale, and as bold.

"These people shall be punished," he cried to the world, flinging his hand up in terrible promise. "You shall learn that I, Bandro, will not tolerate these who brought you such horror. They and their works shall vanish. There will be unequaled prosperity on the planet Earth. And those amongst you who would menace the happiness of the others, shall be dealt with properly. And know you that my Scimitars, brave and true men, shall guard you from such plotters!"

In this vein he continued, for a half hour, subtly threatening the people to

submit to his tyranny. As such Bill recognized it. His heart sank. How could they overcome this man?

The destruction of the capital cities of Germany and Japan struck them all as needless butchery. And yet Bill, thinking it over, told Stevens and Bess-Istra what he believed in his heart to be true.

"Don't pity the people of those countries too much, even if Bandro does destroy them," he grated. "The people of Japan and Germany are hopelessly warped. The Japanese believe themselves to be the divine flower of the world, and worship their emperor as a god in his own right. They believe it is a privilege for 'inferior' races to be ruled by them. The same goes for the Germans. They literally believe themselves to be the chosen people. That belief has been drilled into them for long, long years.

"Nothing, only death, can completely erase the utter cruelty that has been bred into the very minds of those people! The utter conceit and treachery. The utter inhumanness.

"You should have seen Polish dead on the streets of Warsaw as I have—kicked into the gutter by Nazis. You should have seen starving Greeks, all the flesh gone from their bodies. You should have seen the piles of Greek bodies heaped like brushwood in the city streets. You should have seen Chinese coolies used for bayonet practice by Jap soldiers, while other Japs stood by and learned how it was done. . . .

"Misery of the most refined sort means nothing to Japs and Germans—as long as it is not they who experience that misery. It may take more than kindness and love to change them—and maybe Bandro has the right answer . . ."

Bess-Istra's eyes flashed.

"No!" she cried softly. "Bandro's way will never be right, O Bill! Oh, Johnny—Bill—we must take the power away from Sab-Hallo and Bandro before they plunge the world into even greater misery than the terrible Axis powers! We must!"

And if either of the two men had ever had any doubts about the change of heart that had occurred in Bess-Istra, it was dispelled now by the shining tears pendant on the edge of her lashes.

ANOTHER month passed.

The three human beings lived off canned goods in the mission; and also off the cooked bodies of animals the green ray had killed.

But at the end of that month, into Bill's mind leaped the only way in which the gigantic project of freeing the world might be accomplished.

For the world was truly in the grip of a tyrant. Millions of soldiers and civilians in the conquered countries had been destroyed. Men walked in fear and trembling. Another Hitler walked the Earth. The Scimitars were but another Gestapo.

Religions had been discarded. Bandro was forcing humanity to worship—Stuz!

Already temples to the cruel goddess were being erected.

"I am so sorry, Johnny." Bess-Istra's voice was like the sigh of the southern Trades which blew in from the Pacific; her touch of his hand was tender. Stevens looked up gratefully from his despair.

Bill bit his lip, and forced a grin. He knew, of course, that he was in love with Bess-Istra. And he know, of course, that she was in love with Stevens. How could she help but be? He wasn't so much of a boy as he had been. There was a new strength about

him. If Bess-Istra had been changed by these astounding events, so had Stevens. He was a man, now. A man whom Bess-Istra loved. Well, to heck with it!

The three humans listened in on the news constantly. Bandro now made a new edict that all power-gliders—and there were millions of them—would be equipped with a device which would make them controllable by the International Police. That is, any power-glider could be sent crashing to Earth by remote control at the will of any Scimitar!

Bill was grim. "The only way for anybody to travel for any great distance is by power-glider. All other vehicles have been scrapped. This means that if an army should get together, if there were ever any rebellion against Bandro's inhuman rule, his Scimitars could stop it—like that! The power-gliders carrying that army would be destroyed!"

But inside, in the back of his mind, an idea was perking. He frowned. But he couldn't draw the thought out.

At the end of the month, every power-glider was equipped with the control device. And now Bandro made an announcement that filled Bill with the wild fire of hope. Bandro and Sab-Hallo were going to make a "good-will" tour of the world. They were going to stop off at various important cities and speak to the people. And they were going to make their tour in the space-ship that had originally brought them to this planet!

Bill snapped his fingers, whirled on Bess-Istra and Stevens.

"I've *got* it!" he yelled. "Bess-Istra —Johnny—I've got it! We're going to capture the space-ship!"

"Capture the—" Bess-Istra began blankly. Then her glorious, gold-flecked eyes glowed with savage lights. "If we but could," she whispered. "Oh, Bill, if we but could! But—"

The Reverend John Stevens shook his head gravely. "No, Bill." His glance was pitying. "We are only three against a world. Three against the International Police! We couldn't—"

"Shut *up!*" Bill shouted it out. "Listen! There are weapons on our power-glider which can cut through the hardest metals if they are applied close enough, aren't there? We can cut through the hull of the space-ship, get inside, and play hell!"

"But—"

"But nothing, Johnny! Don't you see? *We own the only power-glider in the world that cannot be controlled from a remote distance by the International Police!*"

AND the next day, the power-glider nosed out of the shrouding jungle with its human load. It hovered. But there was no sign that the Scimitars might still be looking for them. It was certain that Bandro thought them dead, their power-glider rusting away, sunk deep in jungle humus.

The glider shot high into the stratosphere. Bill turned its nose southwest. For a half-hour it bored at terrific speed. It was on the trail of the huge space-ship!

"There it is!"

There it was indeed. Miles below them, it plunged along at moderate pace through rolling heaps of storm clouds. It was far above land. It was on its way to San Francisco.

The power glider started to drop. Bill was tense at the controls. In a way this was utterly foolhardy. If the International Police—

"Halt! Give your registration number! Immediately!"

Bill's blood turned cold as the voice came from his *tele*-radio.

Spinning up toward them came a blunt-nosed Scimitar ship. It was a small ship. The three people could see two Scimitars inside.

Stevens whispered dully, "We'll have to give ourselves up."

"No!" The word came from Bess-Istra. "Bill, this ship is the only one protecting the big ship! If we can—"

"Gotcha!" Bill said huskily. "We'll try, anyway! Hang on!"

He touched the controls. The power-glider plunged headlong at the larger ship. Wind screamed.

"Stop immediately—*or you will be stopped!*"

Bill's heart was a stone in his breast. The ship had to get close enough. Could they make it?

They did!

The Scimitar ship, of course, depended on its remote control of the down-plunging power-glider. But this was the only power-glider in the world that couldn't be controlled in such a manner. And before the International Police realized that confusing truth, before they got over their surprise that the power-glider had not halted, those International Police were—*dead!*

Bill savagely sprayed the heat-ray over the transparent fore-part of their ship. They burned.

At the last minute, Bill swerved the glider to escape collision. But it had been necessary to get as close as they did, else the heat-ray would have made the Scimitars only pleasantly warm. As it was, behind them the ship was a hurtling torch.

"Praise God!" Stevens whispered shakenly, from his prone position atop Bill. "In his infinite wisdom, the Lord knows that if we die, all hope dies! But now we shall live—shall see the world truly progress toward Utopia!

"But now we shall live . . ."

Bill was to remember those words.

Bess-Istra whispered joyously, "We have destroyed the space-ship's only protection. There is nothing to stop us, now. Downward, O Bill. Downward!"

And the power-glider dropped downward toward the broad black back of the great space-ship which held Bandro and Sab-Hallo; plunged through a rolling storm-cloud, and in almost complete blackness, landed!

CHAPTER XV

Death of a Great Brain

BILL edged the glider along on the smooth surface until they came to a great round hatch.

"Play the heat beam there and fuse the clasp, and the hatch can be lifted," Bess-Istra whispered. "Hurry, Bill. Oh, hurry!"

The heat-ray speared out. The hasp parted. And in another moment, working amid thunder and lightning, drenched to the skin with plummeting rain, the hatch swung up under Stevens' and Bill's labor.

Bess-Istra raised the glider, sent it silently through the dully lighted aperture. Bill and Stevens dropped through the hatch to the lonely corridor below, pulling the hatch entrance down again.

"Tell me what I must do, O Bill!" Bess-Istra's voice sounded vibrantly. "And I will do anything if I can personally see to it that Sab-Hallo and Bandro get their just deserts!"

Bill grinned to himself. Bess-Istra might have changed, but she wasn't a molly-coddle by any means.

He gave his instructions. Bess-Istra was to float along on the power-glider, close to the ceiling. Bill and Stevens would walk slightly in front, and try to detract attention from the glider. And at the propitious moment, Bess-Istra would blast whoever stood in their way

toward the control room in the nose of the ship.

They started along. Bill's skin crawled. They were in the upper portions of a ship which swarmed with enemies, any one of whom would kill them without mercy. To make it worse, neither Bill nor Stevens had a hand weapon.

Bess-Istra slanted the wings of the glider in toward the body of the ship as they padded down a well-lighted companionway. And just before they reached the bottom two officers of the great ship started up.

The officers looked upward at the two men, blinking. And the angle of their glance was such that they couldn't help but see the glider!

Bill's breath stopped. He halted in mid-step.

The leading officer cried something in his native language. His spastic-gun came out and up. In another moment, Bill and Stevens would have been doubled up in muscle-knotted slumber, had not Bess-Istra acted. The heat-ray flashed out, and human flesh fried, and the two Scimitar officers fell.

With one accord, the two men swooped down and took the spastic-guns. Stevens' face was white, perspiring, but his lips were compressed.

"Atta boy, Johnny!" Bill breathed. "Chin up. You'll see more dead bodies than this before it's over. Come on!"

And there were more dead bodies—a full score, before they finally reached the door of the control room!

But it was the only thing they could do, and they had to act quickly. Bill now drew a deep breath as the guard to the control room, whirled and died and fell. Let out his breath, jerked open the door, and stepped inside.

Bess-Istra and Stevens followed after him. And their presence was unknown until Bill cried ringingly, triumphantly, "Stick 'em up, fellows. This is the big push—the blow-off! *Quick!*"

THERE were only three men in the control room. One was busily leaning over a map, another was at the controls, the third was at the cabinet of a *tele*-eye. This latter man was—Sab-Hallo!

The other two men turned before Sab-Hallo did. Sab-Hallo faced them slowly, like one who, even in defeat, tries to make a good entrance.

Sab-Hallo whispered, after a bitter moment, "And we thought you dead!"

He locked glances with Bess-Istra, his deadly hatred of her showing there. "You have ever stood in my way," he bit out. "I did your will only until I could step into your place. I did step into your place—"

"—but now shall step out!" Bess-Istra flared. "You, whom I trusted, and even now would wish to reinstate if—"

"Look out!"

The cry came from the Reverend John Stevens, a cry of horror.

Bill kept his muscles rigid, tried in a lightning-quick motion of his eyes to take in the whole scene. He saw the pilot of the ship, ignored up to now, draw a weapon. His evident intention was to kill Bess-Istra.

Bill moved his spastic-gun through a tiny arc, woodenly depressed the trigger. The spastic beams leaped out, seizing the fellow's heart-muscle with invisible fingers, throttling it, causing it to stop its beat. The man fell.

Sab-Hallo screamed at that moment. His face contorted. He was like a broad-shouldered, squat gorilla as he leaped toward Bess-Istra, long arms outstretched. Bill did not have time to regain his balance. Bess-Istra was knocked backward to the floor, and the squat scientist, utterly maddened, rav-

ened for her throat.

It was Stevens whose gun danced with tiny lights this time. The vibrations bathed the scientist's head, paralyzed his great brain. He rolled over, eyes staring upward sightlessly. For the brain, unconsciously, controls the life-mechanism of all parts of the body. Sab-Hallo was dead. . . .

Bill scooped Bess-Istra to her feet. She immediately regained possession of her senses.

"The rest of the men in the ship!" she cried. "We must make sure—"

She darted for the control board of the great ship, lifted a panel, depressed a stud.

"The sleep-gas!" she uttered triumphantly. "It will spread everywhere through the ship except to the control room. Oh, Bill—Johnny—we have won! The ship is ours. We can control it from this room, can go everywhere, invincible, impregnable, and shall seize all my disloyal men. Peace—real peace, this time—shall come to the planet Earth and shall endure!"

Her eyes were glorified with her happiness; was reflected in those of Stevens. And Bill himself understood the great thing that had happened. He felt a lump in his throat. The adventures they had gone through had been mad, mad. But it had all been for a purpose. They were here, the three of them who had seen so much of the great change—here, safe and alive!

There was no more danger, no more cause for alarm. It was hard to believe. But it was true! Sab-Hallo was dead. And their worst enemy, Bandro, was at this moment chained in slumber somewhere in the rest of the ship—

"Fools!" a voice grated. "So you thought to return, to take from me the reins of power!"

The three people turned with varying degrees of speed to face—Bandro!

BILL'S high hopes fell, like a boulder shoved over the brink of a sheer precipice; fell and splintered into a million pain-bringing shards.

He was held rooted, part of a tableau which existed for the better part of a minute.

Then Bess-Istra's voice, lifeless, weary, sounded: "We thought you to be in the other part of the ship—sleeping, helpless."

The world-tyrant laughed with mocking intonations.

"And so I would have been," he sneered, "had I not entered the control room while you were so busy with Sab-Hallo. I waited until an opportune moment—waited until you had convinced yourselves that you had succeeded in your purpose. And had you not been so busy with congratulating yourselves on a bold enterprise, it may have been that I would not have you at the point of a gun now."

"The moral being," Bill murmured numbly, "that you shouldn't cross your bridges before they're hatched. What's the pay-off?"

"Pay-off? Ah, yes. The pay-off is that you die!"

Bill said, "As I suspected. So as the white hope of the world, we're complete flops, eh?"

He laughed harshly, with a self-loathing that he did not bother to conceal. "Well, pal, if you insist on having fun, let's get it over with. I can't stand living with myself much longer!"

He meant it. He had been in tough situations before. But always there had been some way out. Some slight chance of surcease. Here there was none. Bandro was too alert, too conscious of the fact that on the deaths of these three people rested all his hopes of future power. Bandro would not be caught napping. Nor was he going to waste any time in the vainglorious

braggadocio which is usually the resort of the callow victor. He was going to sear them with destroying flame—now!

Bandro was holding two guns. Bill used to have trouble identifying the innumerable weapons these people from the stars had brought with them, but he recognized these as a particularly virulent type of heat-ray. Nope, not a chance!

Bandro's trigger fingers started to tense. Bill braced himself for momentary cutting agony, and in his last moments thought of Bess-Istra. . . .

"Stay! In the name of the Lord our God, I command it!"

Bill's head whipped around toward Stevens so fast he almost jerked it loose.

"Johnny!" he gasped. "For cryin' out loud, you can't—"

But the Reverend John Stevens, his eyes flashing with a godly fire, fearlessly stepped from the line and walked toward those guns which were just about to expel their deadly fires!

CHAPTER XVI

He Saved the World!

BANDRO'S eyes bulged. He made a choking sound. He stiffened.

"And in the name of the Goddess Stuz, fool," he bit out, *"stay where you are!"*

The Reverend John Stevens stopped, but his head was held high. His voice was clear, his meaning plain.

"My God does not recognize the Goddess Stuz, unless she be Lucifer in disguise. And Stuz is helpless before Him, or before His servant."

Bill felt a shock of unbelief. For Bandro stood with slack jaw, sweat suddenly leaping to his face. His gunhand trembled visibly. Stevens took one more step forward, his expression serene, confident. Bandro stumbled back a step. A tremendous battle was evident on his face.

He cried in a tone of terrible wrath, "Move back—stop! I'll blast you!"

And:

"You dare not blast me," the young missionary replied. "The Lord will not permit us to die, when our mission is so great. *You will hand me your weapons.*"

Bill felt as if he were witnessing a miracle. Stevens might have been a saint, haloed, holding a radiant cross out before him, exorcising an evil spirit. For it was evident that Bandro was helplessly demoralized! Stevens was walking toward him, one hand outstretched to take the weapons. And Bandro was going to give them to him! Or was he?

Almost it worked.

But it didn't. At the last moment, the hypnotic spell in which Stevens held Bandro was dispersed. Perhaps the motion Stevens made toward the weapons was too sudden. But Bandro—fired!

Bill hardly knew what happened. He yelled. He plunged forward, saw Stevens fall, doubling up; but Bandro's attention could not be turned back to Bill fast enough to keep Bill from tangling with him. And Bill *did* tangle with him!

Bandro's weapons went flying as Bill struck them from his hands. Bandro went bowling backward as Bill's fist connected with his chin. Went bowling backward, and smashed against the instrument panel of the great ship.

Bill caught a vague glimpse of Bess-Istra. She was looking with shocked glance at the heap of human flesh that was the Reverend Johnny Stevens. Then Bandro had rolled toward him again, face twisted in a scream of rage.

Bill smashed against a wall, was held

spread-eagled there a moment. And in that moment, his blood froze.

IN THE vision screen above the instrument panel was the swiftly approaching Atlantic Ocean. Bandro's collision with the instrument board had changed the course of the great ship, and now it was plummeting at terrific speed toward the bosom of the broad sea below!

It was going to strike that heaving surface, was going to be immersed—and rushing tons of water would flow through the hatch that Bill had opened.

Unless—Bill drew a deep breath, growled. He met Bandro's charge with the merciless purpose of a beast—to kill, and kill quickly. His fingers wrapped around Bandro's throat. He bore the man to the floor. Bandro's breath was hot on his face. Bandro's eyes bulged. Almost he succeeded in throwing Bill off. But Bill hung on, insensately, and finally dragged Bandro to his feet.

"Traitor!" Bill gritted.

He flung Bandro halfway across the control room. Bandro spun, twisted, smashed against the bulkhead, and sagged in a lifeless heap.

Bill stood over him, panting. But Bandro would never get up. Bandro's neck was broken. Bandro, tyrant of Earth, was dead.

Bill's head turned dazedly toward the vision screen. His brain awoke to life at last. The ship was so close to the ocean that Bill could see whitecaps.

In another second he was over the instrument board, panting, praying fervently. But he could make nothing of that hodge-podge of controls. It was hopeless. They were going to strike!

He whirled. "Bess-Istra!" he yelled. "The—"

But she was there, bending over the panel. She touched at buttons and finger-sized switches, her hands moving hurriedly. And just as the ship seemed certain to dip beneath the waves, Bess-Istra brought its nose up and sent it boring at a steep angle into the clouds.

In another minute, Bill was trembling with violent relief. The ship was sailing smoothly, controls locked.

Bess-Istra quickly turned from the instrument panel, with a numb expression. She stood over the Reverend John Stevens. Suddenly she crumpled up over him, and her sobs sounded rackingly through the ship.

Bill dropped to his knees, too, looking at the charred spot where a death-dealing ray had burned a hole through the missionary's head. Bill looked and couldn't believe it.

"Johnny," he said in a low, strained voice. "Johnny, you old son-of-a-gun! Wake up. It ain't true. It's all over. We've won. Sab-Hallo's dead. Bandro is dead. We've got a ship that nobody on Earth can stand up against. Everything that you wanted on Earth—peace and good will toward men, and so forth—why, Johnny, they're just beginning, see? The war's over! There's no reason for you to die at a time like this. Particularly when if it hadn't been for you we'd all be dead, and all hope would be dead —" He stopped, choking, eyes blurred.

Bess-Istra's head raised. She was blurred to Bill's sight.

"Say no more," she choked. "For Johnny is— Oh, Bill, Johnny is no more! And he was so brave, and so true, and I loved him so!"

BILL bowed his head. He bit at his lip. He said nothing. The Reverend John Stevens—like Another—had sacrificed himself for humanity.

But finally he raised Bess-Istra's shaking body erect, drew her close against him while she sobbed out her

grief — sobbed, not like a terrible woman from the stars, but like a girl of Earth whose heart is broken with pain unbearable.

Bill kept his eyes wide, his vision straight on the vision screen and the clouds through which the ship was sweeping. Well, it was all over now. All over. There were some loose ends to gather up; Bess-Istra would be made dictator of the world again because, after all, where could you get a better ruler? And Bill would report back to his boss at the New York Corey Features Syndicate and forever forget Bess-Istra.

Forget Bess-Istra! *Oh, God, I don't want to forget her. I want her for myself—*

"You loved him very much," Bill said gently.

"Because he was so good," she sobbed. "I loved him—as I would my own child, Bill—as I would a brother—"

Bill's arms tightened around her glorious body. He smiled. A great song of joy mingled with sadness beat in his pulses.

And she raised her swimming eyes to his, her lip trembling.

"Bill," she said huskily. "Bill. What —what do you think of me? Am I good?—or am I bad? Am I never to be forgiven for the terrible things I did on that other world?"

Bill touched tenderly at her eyes, as if he could draw away the fright that showed there.

"Johnny Stevens would know the answer to that, Bess-Istra," he whispered. "Answer the question for yourself. Think back on what you've done on this world. You've stepped on a bunch of reptiles who didn't give a hoot for human life. Hitler, Tojo, Mussolini. Whatever you may have done in a past that is probably billions of years distant, it's nothing to the good that you've done here. Remember that, Mistress Bess; remember it!"

Her hands tightened on his shoulders. The fright was gone from her gold-flecked eyes. She breathed, "Yes, Bill —oh, yes! I will remember. And I will remember that there is so much to do before people are completely happy —so much. Bill!"

"Yes," he whispered huskily.

She did not answer. The tips of her fingers touched with infinite tenderness at the side of his face. A smile trembled on her perfect lips. In her moist eyes there was a light that Bill had vainly been hoping to see. He grew dizzy with the sight of it. He drew her lips to his and thrilled to her response; held her close and knew that she was his.

As the ship of peace thundered over a world that soon would go mad with joy at the release from all terrors, those two stood locked in close embrace, savoring the first ecstasy of a life that was to be rich indeed.

THE OBSERVATORY

(Continued from page 8)

EVERYONE knows that glass sinks in water and so it may shock you to hear that glass will soon be used as the buoyant substance for life-preservers, life-rafts, life suits, in supports for pontoon bridges, and many other similar devices. This strange glass is all due to the efforts of the Pittsburgh Corning Company of Pittsburgh, Pa., who have developed and perfected a new type of opaque glass that is not only able to float in water itself but can sustain rather heavy loads as well.

The new glass is called foamglas and is being subjected to rigid government and army tests to see whether it can serve as a replacement for kapok, balsa wood and cork, now being used It may also help to conserve our present rubber shortage if it can replace the rubber now used in life-rafts and life-suits.

Another use for the new-type glass is to insulate refrigerators, cold boxes, and similar devices that have been affected by the cork shortage. The foamglas has been found to be vermin proof, fireproof, and odorless. It is made by a process whereby air is "blown" into glass and trapped thus

giving the glass a mass of only one-fifteenth of ordinary glass. It is possible to saw or drill through the glass with the regular tools now used and great things are expected of it.

SAFETY glass has been made a familiar member of the American automobile family. The modern counterpart of the glass first accepted ten years ago has become an integral part in the armor plating of fighting bombers and pursuit planes being manufactured for the United Nations.

The use of glass as a transparent armor in war planes was undreamed of a few years ago. There was one great obstacle. While safety plate in the last ten years had been widely used in automobiles, it was believed a technical impossibility to bend it to shapes suitable for installation in airplanes where curved surfaces of glass were demanded. A type of laminated glass was needed, experts were told.

In searching for methods of bending plate glass for laminating, Libbey-Owens-Ford constructed a series of special furnaces where sheets of plate glass are placed in molds and bent through a new process of intense heat and gravity. Laminating (or "sandwiching" two or more identical sheets of glass together with a plastic binding between them) requires the plate glass to be bent, according to research authorities

Today, a majority of warplane manufacturers in the United States use this laminated safety glass in sections of fighting planes and bombers where both protection and visibility are a necessity. The visibility feature, of course, is obvious. But the protective factor merits an explanation.

Exhaustive tests of bullet resistant glass have proved it capable of withstanding the impact of armor piercing bullets. The curved surfaces increase its ability to resist great shock by "shedding" bullets.

This new bent glass development, together with some of its sisters in plastics, will revolutionize airplane design and construction

RECENT scientific investigations have disclosed some rather odd facts about the largest animal on the earth, the blue whale. In fact, many scientists believe that this whale is the largest animal ever to exist on the earth. Because of its immense size, most men thought that the growing period of the whale would necessarily be quite prolonged. A thorough investigation, however, brought to light the fact that unborn whales sometimes become over 20 feet in length. Thus the blue whale at the time of its birth was shown to be larger than any other first-born. Moreover, the growth as an embryo is very rapid, only taking about ten or eleven months. After the young whale (called a calf) is born, it grows very rapidly, doubling its size in about the first seven months. However, after this period, growth is somewhat slow, and when the whale reaches maturity at two and one-half years it is approximately eighty feet in length. The largest whale discovered was 100 feet long and the oldest whale was twelve years of age. Determining the age of a blue whale is rather peculiar: the ovaries of the cow whale contain an automatic record of each mating season, for every time an egg cell bursts through the ovary it leaves behind a scar. These scars are easily counted and consequently the age of the cow whale is determined.

THE last time you were sick at home or in a hospital, you remember how your attending helper quickly removed from the room all plants and flowers before you retired at night. According to popular belief, dating back many centuries, plants and flowers give off a mysterious nighttime emanation that is injurious to the human body, and, accordingly, they should never be left in sleeping rooms over night. In many hospitals, the nurses regularly remove all plants and flowers from the sick room at sundown with the guiding purpose in mind of preventing injury to the patients while sleeping.

Science, as always, deflates superstition. The United States Public Health Service reports that there is no scientific basis for the belief that plants are especially injurious to the human body during the night. As a matter of fact, says the director of scientific research in the U. S. Department of Agriculture, plants (non-poisonous, of course) are beneficial rather than harmful in sleeping rooms.

During the day, plants absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and after assimilating it, much oxygen and some carbon dioxide is returned to the air. This process slows up during the night. Plants seem to breathe much as animals do—at all times, day and night, they give off oxygen, and they also give off carbon dioxide. Thus there are two processes at work, then. While plants give off more oxygen than carbon dioxide during the day, at night they may give off more carbon dioxide, but a whole greenhouse of plants would hardly give off enough of this gas to affect unfavorably the healthful atmosphere of the air in a normally ventilated room. *Rap.*

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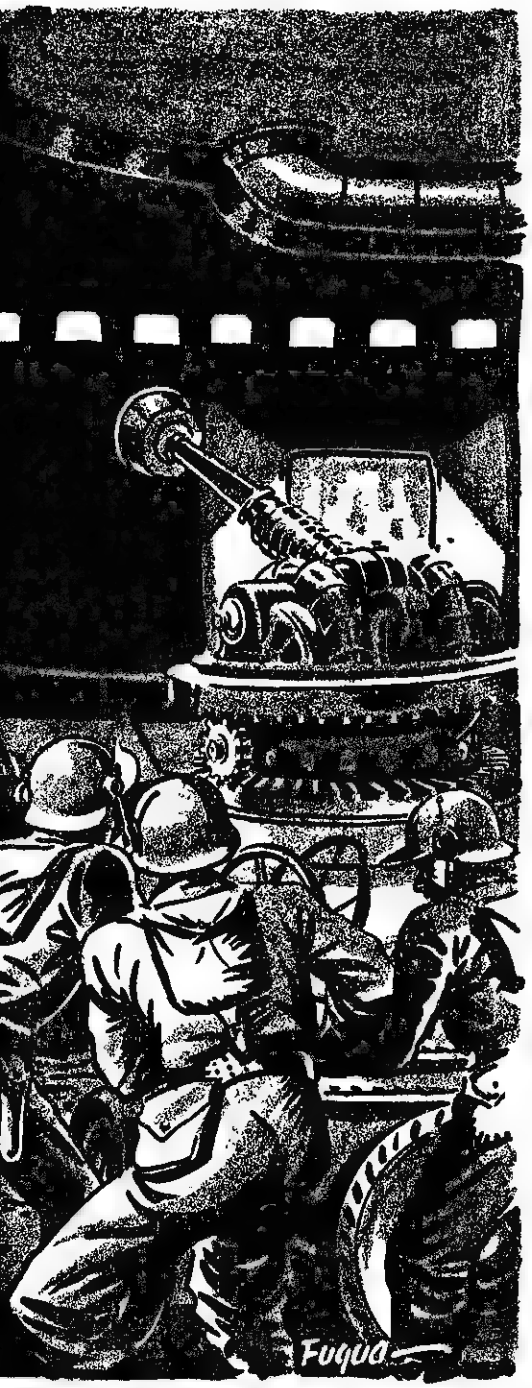
PHANTOM CITY

Evans halted abruptly as the gun muzzle swung toward him

# of LUNA

by P. F. COSTELLO



At first Evans swore it was only a mirage—a phantom city Then horror struck in the night!

CHAPTER I

"WE WILL blast-off for Mars within five minutes," Captain Malcolm, commander of the Earth observation ship, *Astra*, said to his assistant, Phillip Evans. "I just received the clearance order from the central tower." He glanced at the tall, wide-shouldered young man who stood beside him close to the gleaming hull of the *Astra*. "Are we all set?"

Phillip Evans rubbed his lean jaw and took one more careful look at the sheaf of papers he held in his hands.

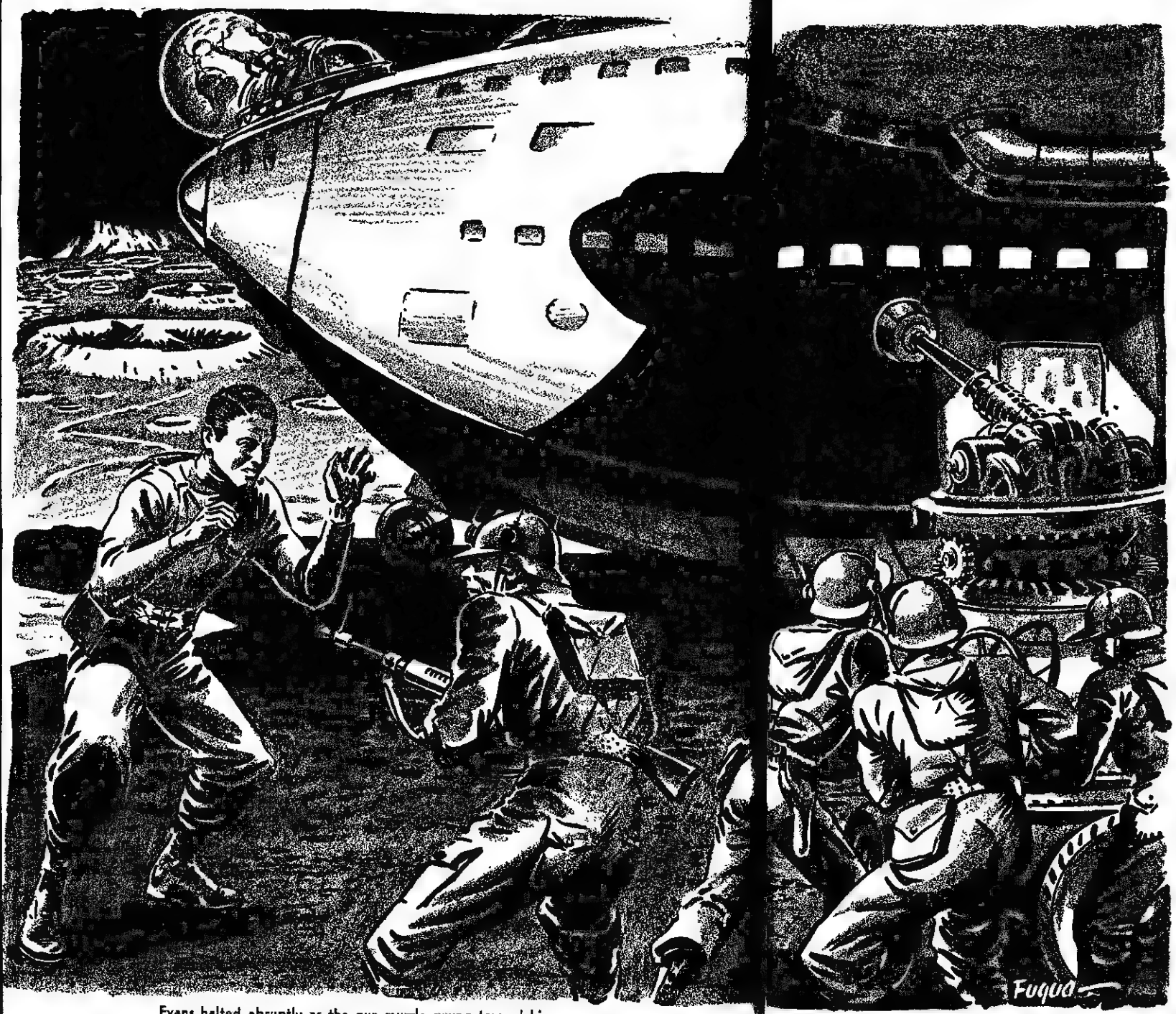
"Yes," he said deliberately, "everything is ready. The supplies were aboard last night. I checked them myself."

"Good," Captain Malcolm nodded. He was a solidly built, middle-aged man with graying hair and alert blue eyes. He was one of the most prominent scientists of Earth, having been appointed to the supreme command of the Central Earth Laboratories five years previous, in 2248 A.D. "We'll be excavating on Mars for several months, completely dependent on our own resources, so we can't take any chances on leaving anything behind."

"We haven't," Phillip said emphatically. "The provisions and equipment we have will take care of us comfortably

PHANTOM CITY of LUNA

by P. F. COSTELLO



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"We haven't," Phillip said emphatically. "The provisions and equipment we have will take care of us comfortably

for six months. The scientific apparatus, charges for the blasting rays, chemical supplies, everything is aboard."

"All the men present and accounted for?" Captain Malcolm asked.

Phillip nodded. "They arrived in a group from the Central laboratory over an hour ago. We have sixty-two field men, a dozen chemists, four ray specialists, a hundred laborers and thirty-two miscellaneous cooks, waiters and servants. I checked everyone aboard personally. Their papers and planetary passports are all in order. I know most of the scientists personally, I've worked in the field with many of them. But I was particularly careful with the laborers and others. I'm sure we've got an excellent crew."

"Fine," Captain Malcolm said. "I have great hopes, Phillip, for this expedition. I'm working on a completely new theory for the Martian excavation and I think that this time we'll definitely find traces of their civilization and culture."

"There's just one thing missing," Phillip said a trifle grimly. "The men are all aboard, but Nada Connors hasn't arrived yet."

CAPTAIN MALCOLM grimaced.

"I knew we were going to have trouble with a woman along on field trip," he said, shaking his head disgustedly. "I have been opposed from the start to taking her with us, but she used her influence with the Secretary of Research and I was forced to consider her application. The woman is a competent scientist, I won't take that from her, but she has no business on a Martian field trip. Maybe," he said hopefully glancing at his watch "she won't make it. We've got only two minutes left and I'm not holding the *Astra* for anyone."

"We can hope," Phillip said, "but she'll probably get here at the last minute." He ran a hand through his close-cropped black hair and said bitterly, "she's probably a long-nosed spinster who wouldn't miss a trip to Mars with a couple of hundred men anymore than she'd stop breathing."

"You've never seen her?" Captain Malcolm asked, smiling.

"No," Phillip said, "but I know the type. Any woman who'd force herself on a scientific expedition because her uncle happens to be the State Secretary of Research, can't be a very admirable sort of person."

"Don't misunderstand me," Captain Malcolm said. "My objections to her presence are purely a matter of principle. From the standpoint of competence, Miss Connors will carry her own weight, I assure you."

"I'll have to be shown," Phillip said ironically.

"Perhaps you won't have the chance," Captain Malcolm said. He glanced at his watch again and then walked up the steps to the open door that was a dark oblong against the gleaming hull of the *Astra*. He turned in the doorway and glanced up and down the empty ramp. "It looks as if Miss Connors has been detained. If she isn't here in sixty seconds we will be forced to leave without her. I'm going up to the control bridge now and signal Central Tower that we're leaving on schedule. You'd better wait here on the ramp until the Tower's all-clear rockets go up; then come aboard and check the seal valves."

"Right," Phillip said.

He glanced at his watch as Captain Malcolm disappeared, then folded his arms over his chest, prepared to wait exactly fifty seconds before following him. And once the hermetically sealed doors of the *Astra* closed they would not open until the ship reached Mars.

He glanced down the deserted space

ramp toward the sliding steel door that separated this section from the rest of the vast terminal. Miss Nada Connors, if she came at all, would come through that door.

The *Astra* was resting in a propulsion slot that was used only for special departures. Overhead, Phillip could see pin-point streaks of light against the sky: the rocket blasts of great transports that were flashing from the terminal's regular propulsion slots at a rate of a dozen a minute.

He glanced at his watch.

Thirty seconds . . .

HE LOOKED down the ramp again toward the steel door. No one was in sight. He watched the second hand on his watch revolve slowly for fifteen seconds, before turning and, with a final last glance along the ramp, starting up the steps to the *Astra's* open door.

He had one foot inside the ship when a faint cry arrested him. Turning he saw a small figure running down the ramp toward the *Astra*.

Phillip's lips tightened stubbornly. It was Nada Connors without a doubt. But she was just five seconds too late!

She was fifty yards from the door and Phillip could see her small white face. A loud flaring explosion sounded above him, and he knew that Central Tower was signalling the *Astra* with all-clear rockets. He glanced up and saw the great blue bulbs directly above the *Astra's* propulsion slot, gleaming with a pale blue luminescence against the black velvet background of the night.

He knew that Captain Malcolm would be signalling the power section of the ship this very second for full speed ahead; and that in a matter of seconds the *Astra's* great, gleaming hull would be hurled into the heavens by the propulsive force of its mighty aft rockets.

The girl was only a dozen yards from the steps and Phillip saw the entreaty in her eyes as she cried out desperately:

"Please, just another second—"

One ankle twisted under her suddenly, and she fell forward to one knee, an involuntary cry of pain breaking from her lips.

Phillip cursed savagely. Women!

He plunged down the steps and reached her side in three giant strides.

"Thank you," the girl said fervently, "if you'll lend me your arm—"

"Shut up, you little fool!" Phillip snapped.

He whipped an arm about her small waist, lifted her to his shoulder and ran toward the open door of the space ship. He took the steps in one stride and dove through the door to the interior of the ship. He dumped the girl unceremoniously to the floor and sprang to the switch that hermetically sealed all valve doors throughout the ship.

He closed it and instantly the door slid shut with a hiss of escaping air as the compressed air chambers forced it into position under tremendous pressure.

And that sound had hardly faded when the aft rockets of the *Astra* roared into a sudden full song of releasing power and the great ship trembled like a live thing.

Phillip dropped to the floor beside the girl.

"We haven't time to get to a blast-off chamber," he said quickly. He put his feet against one wall of the narrow passage and pressed his back against the other. He put his arm around the girl's shoulders and pulled her close to him.

"Hang on," he said.

The girl struggled against the pressure of his arm.

"Is this necessary? she gasped.

"Not unless you want your neck

broken when we blast-off," Phillip said bitterly. "Now shut up and hang on tight. I—"

The words were forced back into his throat as the *Astra* blasted from its propulsion slot at a speed of several hundred miles a minute.

Phillip felt as if his back were going to be shoved straight through the steel wall of the ship. He braced himself using very ounce of muscle in his body, and he held the girl in the vise-like angle of his arm until the pressure slowly lessened and the *Astra* reached a comparatively level position on the arc of its trajectory.

CHAPTER II

PHILLIP got slowly to his feet and shook his head until the buzzing in his ears stopped. He glanced down at the girl. She was still huddled on the floor, hands clasped over her ears.

He bent down, put his hands under her elbows and lifted her to her feet.

"Take your hands away from your ears," he ordered. "That won't help now. A few deep breaths and you'll be all right."

The girl obeyed his orders, but there were spots of color in her cheeks.

"I'm sorry I've caused you this trouble," she said coolly.

"If you'd gotten here on time you wouldn't be apologizing now," Phillip said curtly. "But I suppose punctuality is too much to expect from such a distinguished personage as the niece of the Secretary of Research."

The girl regarded him with steady eyes and Phillip noted that she was rather pretty, with dark hair that curled to her shoulders and fine pale skin. She wore a leatherette shirt and breeches that accentuated the slim, feminine outline of her form.

"You know who I am, then?"

Phillip nodded.

"But of course," he said sarcastically. "Who but the renowned Nada Connors would arrive five seconds before the ship was ready to blast-off?"

"I'm sorry you don't like me," Nada Connors said quietly. "Your objection seems based on the fact that I am a woman and that my uncle is Secretary of Research, two facts which I can't very well change. I'm grateful for what you did for me but you needn't worry that I'll bother you in the future."

"Fine," Phillip said.

"Perhaps you could do me one more favor and tell me where I can find Captain Malcolm. I'd like to let him know that I finally got here."

"He'll be overjoyed," Phillip said. "He's on the central control bridge now, probably checking our course."

"Thank you," the girl said. She looked uncertainly down the narrow corridor that ended abruptly against a closed steel door. "How would I get there?"

"There's an elatube just beyond that door that takes you directly to the bridge," Phillip said. "I'll show you."

HE WAS feeling slightly ashamed of himself for his attitude toward the girl. After all, she was in a tough spot and maybe it hadn't been her fault that she was late. The least he could do was give her an even break.

The girl moved away from the wall and Phillip saw that she was limping, favoring the injured ankle.

"Here," he said, "take my arm. It'll be a little easier."

The girl looked at him and he saw then the stubborn line of her jaw and the determination in her eyes. And he realized that this girl was the type who might bend, but would never break.

"I wouldn't think of bothering you," she said quietly.

She limped to the end of the corridor and he opened the door for her, feeling that he was getting only what he deserved.

He opened the elatube compartment and followed her into the small car.

"I'll go up with you," he said, "I've got to see the captain myself."

They flashed up past the eight layers of the great ship in silence and stepped out onto the bridge of the *Astra*. Captain Malcolm was standing between two men studying the electro-magnetic chart recorder that covered one entire wall of the large room.

This room was the heart of the great space ship. Communication tubes reached every section of the ship from the bridge and one microphone used only in emergency cases, carried the captain's voice to every lounge and compartment of the *Astra*.

Opposite the chart recorder was a large visi-screen which mirrored the reaches of the void into which the *Astra* was now hurtling. Every asteroid, planet or ship for thousands of miles dead ahead was brought into scale focus by the visi-screen.

Captain Malcolm turned and greeted Nada Connors with a smile.

"Glad to have you aboard," he said. "We thought for a while you weren't going to make it."

"I almost didn't," the girl said. "If it hadn't been for this young man," she nodded to Phillip, "I probably wouldn't have gotten aboard."

"Then you two have met?" Captain Malcolm asked.

"No, we haven't," Nada Connors said. "Everything happened so quickly that we didn't have time for introductions."

"No time like the present to remedy that," Captain Malcolm chuckled. "Miss Connors, my assistant, Phillip Evans, probably the best planetary archaeologist in the business."

The girl nodded politely to Phillip.

"Of course I've heard of Mr. Evans," she said. "His books are standard texts at most universities."

Captain Malcolm turned to the man who was standing at his right, a very tall, heavily built man of middle age.

"I'd like you both to meet Jarah Simar, one of the members of our expedition. Mr. Simar is an outstanding authority on rock and lava formations."

PHILLIP had met the man that morning when he had checked his papers, but he hadn't had an opportunity to talk to him. He shook hands with him now and was surprised at the strength in Simar's large, soft hand. Simar smiled at him, bowed slightly to Nada Connors. His face was flat and expressionless and the skin stretched tightly over the cheekbones when he smiled. His eyes were set deeply in his head and they seemed strangely lusterless. Black, glossy hair lay on his scalp like a closely fitting cap.

"How do you do?" he said. His voice was soft, modulated, but strangely flat and lifelesss.

Phillip had never heard of the man before checking his papers that morning. And he was surprised because he certainly should have met or heard of the man at some time, considering his reputation.

There was something about Simar that puzzled him. He couldn't place the feeling definitely and he decided, with a slight irritation at himself, that he was being ridiculous.

"I feel as if I know you both, by reputation at least," Simar was saying in his quiet, listless voice. "I consider it an honor to be associated with you on this expedition. I have the feeling that we are going to accomplish something magnificent under Captain Mal-

colm's scholarly guidance."

"We all hope so," Nada said. "I hope, Mr. Simar, that you don't share Mr. Evans' aversion to my presence aboard the *Astra* on this trip."

Simar raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"It seems incredible," he murmured, "that anyone should object to your presence, Miss Connors — anywhere, anytime."

Phillip found himself disliking the man, but he realized that his feeling was completely illogical and ridiculous.

"My opinion of Miss Connors' presence is of no importance," Phillip said. "She is here and will, presumably, do her share of the work, competently and thoroughly. That is all that matters. I'll admit I didn't like the idea of a woman along on an expedition of this sort, but that's neither here nor there."

"I'm sure we're all going to get along splendidly," Captain Malcolm said smiling tactfully at all of them. "At least we're off to a fine start. We should be beyond heaviside by this time and in a few more minutes we will pass Luna and then we can open up the *Astra* to full speed. Is this your first trip into the void, Miss Connors?"

"Yes, it is," the girl said eagerly. Her face was lit with excitement. "I can hardly wait until we actually reach outer space."

"It will be an interesting experience at this time of the year," Captain Malcolm said. "You should see more spectacular meteor storms and we may see some comets at rather close range."

"When will we pass Luna?" Simar asked softly.

"Very shortly," Captain Malcolm said. "She is off to our side right now, beyond the range of the fore visi-screen. Would you like to see Earth's moon at close range, Miss Connors? I can flash on a side screen and give you a pretty good view."

"That would be interesting," Nada said, smiling. "I can remember several nights on Earth when I was interested in the moon for other than scientific reasons."

CAPTAIN MALCOLM smiled and turned to a uniformed young man who stood at a gleaming control table.

"Turn on the port screen, please."

The young man nodded and flicked one of the switches. Instantly the screen on the port wall began to gleam with pale, pulsing light and, dimly at first, and then with rapidly developing clarity the great orb of Luna came into view, glowing with warm lambent luminescence, e t h e r e a l l y beautiful against the blackness of the void. The outline of its thin atmosphere surrounded it like a filmy halo.

But no one noticed its beauty. Every pair of eyes was centered on the incredible sight of a great city, sprawling for miles in one of the cavernous depressions of Luna, its majestic white spires reaching high into the air.

"Good Lord!" Captain Malcolm cried. "Am I dreaming?" He stared like a man in a trance at the sight of the mighty city on Luna.

Phillip felt as if all the breath had been squeezed from his body.

A city on Luna!

It was too fantastic to contemplate. Luna had been under observation by powerful telescopes from Earth for centuries and no trace of a civilization had ever been discovered. And dozens of expeditions had explored the small satellite and had found evidence that it had been inhabited.

But there was no doubting the evidence of their eyes. Everyone was staring at the great city as if it were some strange specter. Nada Connors' lips were slightly parted and her eyes were dazedly incredulous.

There was a strange expression on Simar's flat, taut features. Even in the tenseness of the moment, Phillip found himself puzzled by the sudden light in the man's eyes and the proud, glowing expression on his face that was as if he were staring at something that moved him to the core of his being.

But he forgot that in his absorption with the great city revealed on the visi-screen.

The tenseness of the moment was suddenly shattered by Captain Malcolm's crisp command to the operator at the control panel.

"Change course immediately and prepare ship for landing on Luna!"

CHAPTER III

A COMPLETE silence followed the captain's order, broken only by the operator's quiet voice as he repeated the instructions into a battery of communication tubes that faced him from the control panel.

The velocity of the *Astra* had by this time carried them past the great city that had been revealed for an instant on the visi-screen. But already Phillip could feel the swinging list of the ship as it began a great arc to circle Luna and come in for a landing.

"Captain Malcolm," he said worriedly, "shouldn't we flash Earth that we're changing our course."

"Time enough for that when we land," Captain Malcolm said crisply.

Phillip's eyes were troubled.

"Are you sure it's wise to land?" he asked. "After all, we have an important job to do on Mars and this interruption may cost us several valuable days."

Captain Malcolm's eyes were burning brightly as he watched the course of the *Astra* changing on the chart recorder.

"What is our work on Mars compared to this discovery?" he said excitedly.

Simar cleared his throat gently.

"Permit me to say, Captain, that I agree with you completely. Luna has always been considered uninhabited. The man who proves otherwise will live forever in the respect of scientists in every quarter of the earth.

"Yes, yes," Captain Malcolm said tensely. "We've got to land. We must."

Phillip glanced at the captain with troubled eyes.

Malcolm was not the type to become so completely exhilarated and excited about anything. He was a casual, deliberate scientist and the plaudits of the mob had never been a factor in his scientific explorations. Now he seemed to be changing type completely, as if his brief glance of the city of Luna had upset his orderly, methodical attitude.

"Another thing," Phillip said, "we can't be sure of the reception we'll receive if that city is inhabited. The people might not be friendly to an invasion of their privacy."

Simar turned slightly toward Phillip and his flat, expressionless features were blankly polite.

"An excellent point, Mr. Evans," he said. "You are quite right to be apprehensive of the danger. But don't you think the potential importance of Captain Malcolm's discovery counterbalances any risk we may be taking."

"I certainly do," Nada Connors said warmly. "I don't think we should let anything prevent us from visiting that city. No risk will be too great. I, for one, am not afraid."

Simar smiled at her.

"Very gallantly spoken, Miss Connors," he said. "I don't think Mr. Evans is afraid, either. He is, I should say, only cautious."

"We'll all be taking the same chance," Nada said, turning to Phillip. "That should certainly ease any fears you might have."

PHILLIP stared at the girl with narrowing eyes and a slow flush burned his cheeks.

"There's no point in discussing the matter," he said shortly. "We are going to land, that's that. With your extensive experience in void exploration, Miss Connors," he said with deliberate, icy sarcasm, "you undoubtedly will be familiar with any sort of trouble that might arise. And if we encounter unfriendly inhabitants, I shall look forward eagerly to the spectacle of your routing them with a sharpened hair pin." He turned from the girl and snapped an order to the operator of the main control panel. "Order the crew to stand by for landing party. And tell them to be armed." He glanced then at the fore visi-screen, which was mirroring the dead surface of Luna as they came in at high speed for a landing. "Reduce speed," he ordered curtly. "Set off fore repulsion rockets and lower landing gear."

Captain Malcolm turned from the visi-screen and nodded approvingly.

"Good boy, Phil," he said.

Phillip turned and strode toward the elatube. Nada followed him and caught his arm.

"I was just being fresh a minute ago and I'm sorry." She smiled ruefully. "I seem to be making a career out of apologizing to you. I know you don't like me, but it might be more pleasant for both of us if we'd stop hitting in the clinches."

Phillip studied her small intense face for a moment.

"Sure," he said. "Let's forget it."

He stepped into the elatube and closed the door. His words, curtly spoken, had been like a slap in the face to the girl. He shrugged as the car started downward. Her crack about his being afraid to make a landing hadn't been easy to take.

When he reached the main level of the ship he found several of the crew waiting at the main hatch for the *Astra* to land.

He noted that they were all armed with ray tubes. They all looked at him inquiringly.

"What's up?" one of them asked.

"We'll know in a minute," Phillip answered noncommittally.

A few seconds later he felt the *Astra* bump lightly on the surface of the moon.

"I don't think we'll need oxygen helmets," Phillip said. "We're in one of the depressions of the Lunar surface and there should be sufficient atmosphere."

He stepped to the door and snapped the switch that controlled it. It slid open with the hissing sputter of releasing air.

PHILLIP stepped through the doorway and dropped to the hard, flaky surface of the small satellite. His eyes swept about for several seconds and a tight worried line formed about his mouth.

There was nothing in sight except the dead craters of the moon and the vast, unbroken expanse of shale and rubble stretching to the horizon.

There was no trace of the mighty city they had seen for a flashing instant on the visi-screen.

Several of the crew had dropped down beside him and they were glancing about carefully, their hands close to their weapons.

Captain Malcolm and Simar stepped out of the ship together. Captain Malcolm swept the horizon with puzzled eyes.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Possibly we overshot it," Phillip said.

The captain shook his head.

"Impossible! I checked our position when we sighted it on the visi-screen and we returned to that exact position. We can't be more than a few hundred yards off, one way or the other."

From where they were standing a great, desolate valley spread before them, surrounded on three sides by bleak, towering mountains.

Simar, Phillip noticed, was staring hungrily at the great depression and his face was lighted with the same proud expression that he had noticed when they first sighted the city of the towering spires.

"What's your guess, Phillip?" Captain Malcolm asked.

Phillip shrugged. "Possibly our instruments are off and we've landed miles from the city. Or maybe we were all suffering from an optical disturbance and didn't see a city at all, but some weird distortion that resembled a city."

"I can't believe that," Captain Malcolm, shaking his head emphatically.

"I agree with you," Simar said gravely. "We actually saw a city, there's no doubt of that. I think Mr. Evans may be close to the truth when he suggested that our instruments might be off a fraction. That would be enough to place us miles from the spot where we originally saw the city. The only solution is to search the area until we find it."

"But that may take weeks," Phillip protested.

"What does time matter," Captain Malcolm said irritably. "We must find that city. Don't you realize how important this thing is?"

"Frankly, I don't," Phillip said. "We can communicate with Earth, advising them of our discovery and they can send dozens of ships here to investigate. It isn't essential that we waste time here looking for a phantom city, when we should be on our way to Mars. And this search may take so long that circumstances on Mars will have changed and we won't be able to make the explorations we planned."

Captain Malcolm turned suddenly on Phillip and his eyes were blazing.

"Why are you opposed to finding this city?" he asked. His voice was quivering with a rage, that was as bewildering to Phillip as it was sudden. "What are your real reasons? I am commander of this expedition and my authority is complete. I say we will remain on Luna until we have found the city we saw in our visi-screen, and that is final."

PHILLIP checked the angry retort that was trembling on his lips. The captain seemed to be a different person as he stood glaring at him, and Phillip's concern for the man outweighed his anger.

"As you say," he said quietly.

Captain Malcolm coughed and laid a hand on Phillip's shoulder.

"Sorry I had to speak brusquely, son," he said, "but this thing is important."

"I think I have a suggestion which might help," Simar said. "Our chief problem is finding this city as quickly as possible so we will not take too much time from the important work we must do on Mars. I have done considerable experimentation with a machine that locates metals and minerals that are above the ground. We used the machine in Asia to determine the exact location of cities and found it very successful. The machine has never been used practically, for its uses would be limited to warfare and we have for-

tunately had no wars on Earth for many centuries." He smiled at Captain Malcolm. "If you think it worthwhile I could build a small replica of my machine in a matter of hours and we could locate the city with it very quickly."

"I think it definitely worthwhile," Captain Malcolm said enthusiastically.

"Thank you," Simar said.

"I wish you'd get to work on it immediately. I'll send a few scouting expeditions out to search the immediate neighborhood, just in case the city is within a few miles of us. And if they don't find it, we'll use your machine tomorrow. Do you think you can have it ready by that time?"

"Certainly," Simar said. "I will need to use the ship's laboratory for several hours."

"I'll arrange that," Captain Malcolm said; "and if you need any supplies I'll give you the necessary requisitions."

"That will be excellent," Simar said, inclining his head slightly. "I will get to work immediately."

He walked up the portable steps which had been lowered from the hatch and disappeared into the interior of the ship.

Captain Malcolm followed him with his eyes.

"He's a stimulating fellow," he observed. "I can't remember when I've been so impressed by a man."

"He is very interesting," Phillip said thoughtfully. "I'm going to enjoy finding out more about him."

He left Captain Malcolm and walked slowly up the stairs to the ship.

CHAPTER IV

HE MET Nada Connors in the corridor that led to the hatchway.

"What happened?" she asked.

"Nothing," Phillip said. "We must have been a little off our course. There's no city in sight."

"What are we going to do now?"

"Send out searching party in the immediate vicinity," Phillip answered. "If they don't find anything, Simar is building some sort of a machine that may do the trick."

"When are the searching parties starting?" Nada asked.

"As soon as the captain gets them organized and gives each of them a definite territory to cover. But I'm leaving right away, by myself."

"Could I go with you?" Nada asked. "I promise I won't be any bother." She went on hurriedly as Phillip didn't answer, an embarrassed flush staining her cheeks. "I know you don't think I'll be any help, but I'm an excellent shot and I never get lost. Please take me with you."

Phillip looked down into her eager, anxious face and the edge of ice around his heart began to melt.

"Okay," he said. "Get yourself a ray gun and oxygen helmet. We're leaving right away."

"I won't be a minute," Nada cried. She turned and stared quickly down the corridor, but she stopped at the door and looked back at him, smiling. "Thanks a million times," she said and disappeared through the door.

THEY left the ship ten minutes later and Phillip headed directly down into the great depression that stretched for miles from the site where the *Astra* had landed. The ground was rocky and uneven, covered with a thin filmy shale dust that slipped treacherously beneath their leather boots.

"Watch yourself," Phillip said over his shoulder to Nada. "You won't do us much good with a broken leg."

They walked for a half hour and by that time they were out of sight of the

Astra, descending deeper and deeper into the great hollow formed by the three towering mountain peaks.

Phillip called a halt when they reached a great flat boulder and they both sat down gratefully. The atmosphere was heavy and dense and breathing was a laborious job. But they hadn't used their oxygen belts.

Nada leaned back on the palms of her hands and swept her eyes slowly over the vast, spreading valley that now appeared covered with a white mist which was actually the thick, settling atmosphere of the tiny satellite collecting in the basin of the depression.

Phillip glanced at her profile.

"Do you find it interesting?"

"Yes," she answered slowly. Her slender, arched eyebrows drew together in a frown and she looked at him anxiously. "You'll think I'm silly," she said, "but there's something here, an intangible presence, that is." She smiled apologetically and said, "I was going to say frightening, but that's ridiculous."

"Maybe," Phillip said. He glanced out over the valley and he noticed that the misty atmosphere seemed to be thickening, drifting toward them in slow, deliberate waves. And he had the sudden, peculiar sensation that something was plucking at his mind with long, soft fingers. He shook his head irritably.

"I don't like the place any more than you do," he said decisively. "Possibly we're both just superstitious but I think we'd better get back to the ship."

He stood up and helped the girl to her feet and they started back up the long slope that led to the ship. Phillip stumbled over a hard, rocky object a few feet from the boulders on which they had rested, and he bent down automatically and picked it up.

The dense swirling atmosphere was pressing so closely on them now that he could hardly see what he held in his hand. But he waited until a faint breeze moved the heavy cloying air, then he glanced down and his heart began to beat with sudden excitement.

For the object in his hand was shale-encrusted piece of metal, broken and corroded, but still recognizable as a small, delicately shaped urn.

He called Nada to his side and showed her the piece of metal. She took it in her hands and studied it closely.

"It looks like processed steel," she said. Her voice was incredulous.

"That's just what is it," Phillip said, "and it was shaped by an intelligent hand."

A DOZEN thoughts were racing through his mind. This piece of steel, produced by a forge and shaped by a mold, was evidence of an advanced civilization governed by rational life of a high order of intelligence. But how had it gotten here? Was it a relic of some civilization that had existed thousands of years ago on this small satellite of Earth?

That thought was not quite as preposterous as it would have seemed to him twenty-four hours before; for he had seen the image of a great city on this moon through the *Astra's* visi-screen.

He dropped the piece of metal into his pocket.

"Let's not say anything about this for a while," he said to Nada.

"Whatever you say," she said. Her voice seemed strangely weak to him and he noticed that her face was white and drawn. He looked at her anxiously.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

She put a hand to her forehead.

"All right," she said. She shook her head slowly. "Physically there's nothing wrong with me, but my head feels as if it were going to split open. It—

it's like a hand were squeezing my brain down to the size of a marble."

Phillip put an arm about her waist.

"Lean against me," he said. "We'll be out of here in a few minutes."

He started up the slope, his lungs laboring with the effort of practically carrying the girl. There was a tight line of worry about his mouth. He was feeling again the sensation of tiny fingers plucking at his brain, drawing from it all strength and power of thought and decision. He wondered it the girl's sensation were similar.

He realized then that the sensation had disappeared when he had been concentrating on the problem of the urn-shaped piece of metal he had found. Whatever influence was sapping his mind, it was powerless apparently when his brain was focused completely on something else.

He glanced down at the girl. Her eyes seemed to be glazing and her lips were parted slightly, as she breathed the heavy, murky atmosphere into her laboring lungs.

"Nada!" he said sharply.

The girl shook her head weakly and put a hand to her forehead.

"I can barely hear you," she said, and her voice was only a feeble whisper in his ears.

"Nada!" he cried. He knew he had to snap the girl out of the fogged, comatose condition she was drifting into. He had to shock her, force her mind to concentrate its focus on something that would break the effect of the trance-like spell that was gripping her brain.

"Nada!" he cried. "Listen to me!"

He saw a momentary flicker of consciousness in her eyes.

"You've got to think!" he snapped. "We're in danger. Unless you snap out of it neither of us will have a chance." He forced a bitterly, jeering sarcastic note into his voice and said, "I told you this would happen. You're just a liability on this trip. You can't carry you're own weight. I hope you're convinced now that I wasn't just talking to hear myself talk."

NADA twisted against his arm and faced him, angry color in her cheeks. Her eyes were glinting like bright blue diamonds.

Phillip felt a happy surge of relief. The rage the girl felt had cleared her mind and driven away fog-like vapors that had been plucking at her consciousness.

"Take your arm away from me," she said, "I can manage myself. I don't need you for anything, Phillip Evans."

She struggled away from him and strode on ahead, her small shoulders squared defiantly.

In another ten minutes they were out of the basin of the valley and the air was clearer. Phillip found that he no longer had to fight against the queer sensation that seemed to be induced by the thick, heavy atmosphere.

Nada was still stumbling on ahead of him and he could tell from the straight, angry lines of her back that she was still seething.

He caught up with her.

"Nada," he said, "I —"

"There's nothing to say," she said coolly, keeping her eyes fixed straight ahead and her small chin tilted stubbornly. "I suppose I should thank you," she said, after a moment of silence. "I almost passed out, and, as you reminded me so clearly, I was definitely a liability. But," she added icily, "I can't work up much respect for a person who uses a time like that to start crowing, 'I told you so.' "

"You silly little fool," Phillip said disgustedly. "You don't know the score and it looks as if you'll never find out. I talked that way to snap you

back to consciousness. If you can't realize that, you're hopeless."

He strode on, glowering. Damn this girl! Why did they have to be at each other's throats all the time? He realized that if he were actful and diplomatic he could probably explain the necessity for what he had done but he had no intention of being tactful or diplomatic. If she couldn't understand without having a drawing shoved in front of her eyes, she could just go right on thinking him a cad and a boor.

They were within sight of the *Astra* now and Nada went on ahead. When they reached the ship she turned in the hatch way and said, "Thank you for a very lovely trip," and then disappeared into the interior of the great space craft.

Phillip was still glaring at the door when Captain Malcolm appeared.

"Hello, Phillip," he said. "Did you find anything?"

Phillip shook his head.

"Not a trace."

"I've sent four parties out," the captain said, "but only two have reported so far. They've found nothing. Simar, however, has almost completed his machine. Would you like to take a look at it?"

"Very much," said Phillip.

He followed the captain into the ship, wondering whether he should tell him of the powerful influences that seemed contained in the atmosphere in the basin of the valley.

For some reason he decided to wait.

CHAPTER V

SIMAR was alone in the *Astra's* large, well equipped laboratory when Captain Malcolm and Phillip entered. He was working over a small delicate machine, hardly six inches square, constructed of gleaming metal and bristling with tiny filaments and rheostats. He looked from his work when he saw them and smiled his flat, expressionless smile.

"Come in, gentlemen," he said affably. "I am almost done with my work. Would you care to inspect it at close range?"

Captain Malcolm moved forward eagerly and Phillip followed.

The machine had four handholds, one on each side, and from above a cone pointed down toward the top of the machine, bathing it with a powerful orange ray.

"Would you explain how it operates?" Captain Malcolm asked.

"With pleasure," Simar replied.

He pointed to a band of rheostats on the front panel of the machine and began to explain the purpose of each, talking swiftly, surely. His explanations were thick with scientific phrases and many bewildering inconsistencies were apparent to Phillip as Simar talked on, pointing to various parts of the machine and discussing their operations at great length.

The conviction gradually grew in Phillip that the man was lying. That his explanations were simply meaningless phrases intended to bewilder rather than clarify. What purpose Simar could be serving, Phillip couldn't fathom, but he was increasingly sure that Simar's machine was not built to locate the missing city.

"What is the purpose of the ray?" he asked, when Simar paused for breath.

Simar glanced at him and smiled.

"I'm not sure you will be able to understand," he said smoothly. "Not that I mean to belittle your scientific comprehension," he added, with a slight deferential bow, "but the principle of this ray is based on theories which I, alone, have undertaken to examine."

"Simar," Phillip said, choosing his words deliberately, "I think you're a fraud. I don't think this machine will

locate the city we're looking for. Your explanations of its operations didn't make a particle of sense. They were simply meaningless phrases thrown together in a sort of scientific mumbo-jumbo either to cloak the fact that you're machine is useless, or to hide its real purpose."

Captain Malcolm swung angrily on Phillip.

"I won't have you insulting Simar this way," he cried. "He's doing his best to help us locate the city which is more than can be said for you."

Phillip shrugged.

"If the machine works I am ready to apologize. But," he said with a grim smile, "Simar knows it won't work as well as I do."

"I regret that you are so skeptical," Simar said. "If a demonstration will convince you, I am only too happy to oblige. The machine is ready to operate now."

HE MADE an adjustment on the band of rheostats and a slow curving smile flattened his lips against his teeth.

"I am waiting to be shown," Phillip said curtly.

Simar straightened from the machine.

"May I crave your indulgence for a few moments," he asked quietly. "I promised Miss Connors' that I would tell her when I was ready to demonstrate the machine. She seemed quite interested in its operation. If you will wait here for just a second I will go and get her."

"Go right ahead," Captain Malcolm said. "A few minutes won't make any difference."

"Is that agreeable to you, Mr. Evans?" Simar asked.

"Of course," Phillip said.

Simar returned in a few minutes with Nada. Phillip glanced at her but she avoided his gaze. He noticed that she had changed into a short tunic and soft slippers that buckled about her slim, bare ankles.

"Will you please step to the machine?" Simar said. "It will be necessary that each of you hold one of the handholds on the sides."

Phillip took a place between Simar and Captain Malcolm, facing Nada over the gleaming machine. The metal handhold was cold to the touch and Phillip sensed that it was throbbing faintly, as if an unfelt electric current were coursing through it.

"We are ready," Simar announced.

He adjusted one of the rheostats and flicked a switch on the side of the machine.

"It will not take long," he murmured. He was smiling softly as he watched the orange cone of light glow with greater strength on the gleaming surface of the machine.

Phillip felt nothing at first, but gradually he noticed that the room was growing darker. He glanced at Nada and he had trouble focusing his eyes on her white face. She was looking at Simar with worried eyes.

"Do not be alarmed," Simar said gently. His flat expressionless face seemed to be glowing with an inner radiance against the growing darkness of the room.

Phillip tried to speak but he couldn't. A sudden suspicion flashed into his mind. He tried to cry out but the words made no sound.

The darkness was almost complete.

With a savage wrench he tried to jerk his hand from the machine, but he couldn't force his tightly clamped fingers to open.

Simar was grinning satanically and his face was the only thing visible in the darkness; and it shone strangely like something ghostly and unreal.

Phillip saw him stretch a hand to the machine and turned one of the rheostats with a slow, deliberate motion and, as he did so, he flung his blazing face back in a savage gesture of ecstatic triumph.

"I have not failed, O mighty Aganda!" he cried.

SWIRLING light suddenly flashed about them, but it was not light from any of the beams of the *Astra*. It was blinding white light that might have come from the depths of space, where the black of the void faded and unborn worlds blazed defiantly against the illimitable darkness.

Phillip heard a roaring in his ears and felt the force of a mighty suction that grew steadily more powerful, more irresistible.

And then he was swept upward like a twig before a violent storm and he felt all of his senses leaving him as blackness, deep, vast and unending, closed like an inexorable pall over his consciousness.

CHAPTER VI

RETURNING to consciousness was like swimming upward through murky, impenetrable water toward a flicker of light miles above his head. His eyes opened slowly and the flicker of light suddenly grew from a pin-point to dazzling brilliance that struck his eyes painfully.

He blinked and opened his eyes again and this time he made out two dim figures standing over him, looking at him with speculative eyes.

When he opened his eyes the third time he identified the figures as Simar and Captain Malcolm. Simar's flat face was expressionless as usual, but the captain's features looked dazed and his eyes were dull and vacant.

Phillip was lying on smooth ground and the sky above his head was a bright, glaring blue. Turning slightly he saw that Nada was lying beside him, her eyes closed, breathing evenly.

He struggled to a sitting position and then he saw the *things* that surrounded him, and his heart began to thud desperately against his ribs.

The creatures that circled him were thin, greyish and their hideous bodies seemed composed of some pulpy material that visibly pulsated as they moved. They wore metallic garments that ended at their waists and left their long, tendril-like arms and legs free. Their faces were blank, smooth. One colorless eye gleamed in each forehead. And each of those terrible eyes was fixed in a dead stare on Phillip and the girl.

"You seem alarmed," Simar murmured. "You needn't be. My comrades will obey my slightest command and it is not my intention to have you killed."

Phillip tore his fascinated gaze from the weird monstrosities and turned to Simar.

"What kind of a game are you playing?" he demanded.

Simar smiled and stepped to one side and gestured toward a deep valley surrounded on three sides by towering peaks. In the basin of the valley was a great city, sprawling for miles. Great buildings loomed high in the air, their white sides glistening under the harsh light of the sun.

"Perhaps this will aid in your orientation," Simar smiled. "Do you recognize the place?"

Phillip climbed to his feet and he felt that his brain was reeling on its foundations. For this valley was the Lunar depression which he and Nada had explored. And this city was the one they had seen mirrored on the *Astra's* visiscreen.

The thought of the *Astra* caused him

to turn sharply toward the place where the great ship had landed. But his eyes met nothing but the smooth, unbroken terrain, stretching for miles.

The Astra was gone!

"Your ship is not here," Simar said quietly.

"Where is it?" Phillip demanded. He felt dazed, breathless with shock. "Have they gone without us?"

"No," Simar smiled, "the *Astra* is precisely where we left it, *one hundred thousand years in the future.*"

PHILLIP felt the words of Simar crash into his brain with an almost physical impact.

"One hundred thousand years in the future!" he cried. "You're mad!"

"You will find I am quite sane," Simar murmured. "I will tell you everything when we reach our city and you will find much of your bewilderment erased." He smiled pleasantly. "You must accept the situation whether you like it or not, so I'd advise you to be practical. Haven't you noticed how adaptable our Captain Malcolm is?"

Phillip stared at the captain's vacant vacant face and dull eyes and a chill of horror swept through him.

"What have you done to him?" he said grimly. "If you've harmed him—"

"You are in no position to be threatening," Simar said quietly. "You will come with us now, agreeably or otherwise."

"I'll be damned if I will," Phillip said hotly.

Simar shook his head sadly.

"It is unfortunate that you are adopting such an uncooperative attitude," he murmured. He turned slightly and faced the silent creatures who were watching Phillip with fixed, dead eyes.

He spoke no word, he made no movement, yet with one accord the creatures suddenly moved with bewildering speed toward Phillip. Before he could move a half dozen of their rope-like tentacles had whipped about his arms, pinioning him helplessly. Others snapped about his legs and he was lifted into the air, unable to move a muscle.

"You see how useless is resistance?" Simar asked.

Several of the creatures picked up the girl and started down the long slope toward the city. Phillip was borne along after them.

Simar chuckled.

"Your education will begin very shortly, my impetuous young friend," he murmured.

Captain Malcolm followed behind them, his face expressionless, his feet dragging loosely on the smooth ground.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN they reached the city, the weird creatures carried Phillip and the unconscious girl along a broad avenue flanked on either side by the great white buildings that were characteristic of this metropolis.

They came to a stop at last before an immense domed building which was guarded by several ranks of the weird, tentacles-armed creatures.

Philip was lowered to the ground and the great metal door of the domed building swung ponderously open.

Simar came up to Phillip's side.

"This is the palace of our ruler, Aganda," he said. "When he has seen you I will take you to your quarters where you will be fed."

Phillip glanced at Nada who was still held aloft in the tendril arms of the weird creatures. He prayed that she would stay unconscious.

"What about the girl?" he asked Simar.

"She will not be harmed."

He strode ahead of Phillip through the great door and the strange captors secured Phillip's arms with their ropy tentacles and led him through the door into a huge shadowy room that was completely bare except for the raised dais in the center of the floor and completely unoccupied except for the creature who sat silently there watching their approach with an unwinking, lifeless eye.

Simar prostrated himself before the dais and the enthroned creature, who was identical to the others Phillip had seen, except that, if possible, he was even more repulsive in appearance, stared at Simar's prone figure with a glassy, expressionless eye.

Phillip sensed that the two were communicating and it was not hard to guess that the subject of their conversation was he and the girl, who had been brought in and stretched before the throne.

His guess was confirmed when the creature on the dais turned his eye slowly from Simar and fixed its dead stare on him. The creature's inspection lasted for a full minute and then it swung slowly to the slim figure of the girl before the throne.

Again the inspection lasted a full minute, before the eye swung back to Simar who rose immediately to his feet and turned to Phillip.

"Come with me," he said quietly.

Nada stirred slightly and a low moan passed her lips. She moved her head weakly from side to side and then her eyelids fluttered and opened. She stared for a blank, uncomprehending moment at the hideous creatures who stood over her and then a convulsive shudder passed through her slim body.

She pressed the back of her hand against her mouth to choke back the scream that tore at her throat. Her eyes were wide with a loathing fear.

PHILLIP dropped to his knees beside her and held her close in his arms.

"What are they?" she cried, her face pressed against his chest. "Take me away from here, please."

"Get hold of yourself, honey," he whispered. "We're in for a bad time but we can't crack."

Simar coughed meaningly.

"Are you ready? Or shall I have my comrades use a bit of forceful persuasion?"

Phillip turned to him, his face a mask of cold, white fury.

"If one of these slimy monstrosities tries to touch Nada I'll kill her myself rather than let that happen."

Simar shrugged.

"Then supposing you come along under your own power? I am trying to be gentle with both of you but your attitude may force me to change my tactics."

Phillip helped Nada to her feet. She buried her head against his shoulder. "I can't look at them," she whispered. Her voice was choked with horror. "I just can't."

Phillip put his arm about her waist and held her close.

"You don't have to," he said. "Keep your eyes closed and I'll lead you."

Supporting Nada with his arm, Phillip followed Simar and several of the weird creatures across the great hall through a door that led them into a labyrinthine system of connecting corridors and finally brought them to a row of dungeon-like cells hundreds of feet below the surface of the ground.

Each cell was constructed of thick wire mesh and a door was its only opening. One of the creatures opened the door and Phillip and Nada were shoved into the cell.

Simar followed them in and closed the door behind him. The four crea-

tures that had escorted them to the place moved a few dozen feet away and crouched in the corridor, watching the cell with sluggish eyes.

Phillip glanced about the small cell. There were cots facing each other from opposite walls and a tube of running water in one corner. That was all.

Simar noticed his inspection and smiled.

"True," he murmured, "the quarters are not palatial, but if your attitude becomes more cooperative you will find that we are not completely without physical comforts here at Lunas."

Phillip led Nada to one of the cots and sat down beside her, still holding his arm about her shoulders. She was sobbing, now, but the sound was muffled against his chest. He could feel her slim shoulders quivering under his hand.

He looked up at Simar and his eyes were bleak and hard as frozen steel.

"All right, Simar," he said, "you apparently hold all the cards. What do you want with us?"

"Now you are being more sensible," Simar said.

HE SAT down carefully on the cot facing them and smiled his flat, humorless smile.

"First," he said, "let me caution you against attempting to escape from Lunas. You will be under constant surveilance and the penalities for any such action will be very severe. I hope you will be sensible in this matter."

He leaned forward slightly on the cot and cleared his throat softly.

"I will begin my story by telling you something of this place. You must try and think in terms of the past, the past of a hundred thousand years ago, when this moon of Earth still possessed sufficient heat to nurture vegetation and make its surface habitable. In that time the creatures you have seen, of which I am one myself, were a flourishing, highly developed species of intelligent life. Civilizations, however, do not all progress along the same lines, and our advancement was chiefly marked by the development of elementary devices to span time and the cultivation of a system of thought transference, which did away with the necessity of speech, with the result that the vocal chords of our people evenually atrophied.

"In all lines of science we were striving ceaselessly to attain perfection and if we had developed normally there is no limit to the ends we might have achieved."

Simar paused and Phillip noticed that his eyes had left their faces and he seemed to have forgotten their presence.

"We might have grown great and glorious," he went on in a changed voice that was charged with bitterness, "but life on Lunas was obliterated in the twentieth of a second and the greatest civilization the U n i v e r s e has ever known was reduced to a pile of rubble in the twinkling of an eye. A meteor storm of unprecedented size and speed smashed Lunas into the dust, destroying it forever."

Nada had raised her head as Simar spoke and only the redness of her eyes indicated that she had been crying. She was listening closely to Simar's story, and now she said,

"Hadn't your scientists been able to predict the course of the storm?"

"They had," Simar answered, "and we had built a force shield to deflect the meteors but we hadn't sufficient experience to make the shield work effectively. We were working frantically on it when the storm struck. And before a man could draw a breath the life of Lunas was sealed under millions of tons of molten metal.

"And the very suddenness of the onslaught was the thing that saved us from complete obliteration. It may be hard for you to understand but the very speed with which the life of Lunas was crushed out prevented the life forces from escaping completely from the area. Millions of us were destroyed in a physical sense, but our life forces were held in suspension under the tons of metal that had destroyed our city.

"After the molten meteors had cooled, thousands of years later," Simar continued, "we were able by sheer, disembodied will power to project a life substance to Earth where it assumed the form of a human being."

SIMAR smiled then and then bowed slightly in a self-depreciatory gesture.

"And I, as you may have guessed, am that humble person," he said. "I appropriated this body and then the rest you can probably surmise. I constructed a time machine on the principles we had discovered thousands of years before and arranged to be included among the members of your expedition. But I had no intention of going to Mars. I wanted to return to Luna and that was easily managed. The city that appeared in the visi-screen was but a phantom, a figment of your collective imaginations induced by the concerted will of the millions of life forces still held in suspension on the buried city of Lunas."

"What did you do to Captain Malcolm?" Phillip asked.

"Captain Malcolm as you know him is dead forever," Simar said. "His body was absorbed by a liberated life force before he reached Lunas."

Phillip had difficulty in controlling an impulse to spring at Simar's throat and crush the dead, unclean life from his body.

But he fought back the red rage that coursed through his body in hot waves. He knew that Nada and he were in terrible danger and their only hope was to play for time, to find, somehow, a means to return to their own time.

"It wasn't hard," Simar continued, a cool smile on his lips. "As a matter of fact, when you and Miss Connors explored the basin of the Lunasian valley, her mind was almost taken over by one of the life forces. If you noticed, the ectoplasmic emanations from the buried city of Lunas drifted toward you the instant your presence in the valley became manifest. If you hadn't distracted her mind, forced her to concentrate on something else she would have been lost to you forever."

Nada squeezed Phillip's arm with her hand,

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "You tried to tell me that but I wouldn't listen. I've been nothing but a drag on you since we left Earth. It's no wonder you despise me."

"Skip it," Phillip said. "You've got more guts than most of the men on the *Astra.*" He grinned down at her and rocked her chin gently with his fist. "We'll lick this thing."

"I beg your pardon," Simar said, "but I am afraid I must disappoint you. You are here to do a specific job and when that job is done you will be—ah—liquidated is the word, I believe."

HE crossed his legs and leaned back comfortably on the narrow cot.

"I will tell you now why I brought you here. At this moment the meteor storm I spoke of has not yet occurred. It will occur tomorrow evening. Before that time you are going to examine our force shield and put it in working order. Do I make myself clear?"

"Supposing I can't fix it?" Phillip asked.

"You will repair the machine," Simar said, emphasizing each word carefully. "Unfortunately you are not going to have much time. I miscalculated slightly in my entropy estimate and consequently we arrived back at Lunas only a day before the impending destruction of the city by the meteor storm. But your skill will avert that catastrophe and Lunas will be saved."

"Has it occurred to you," Phillip said, "that you aren't in a very good position to be making demands? You need my knowledge to save your own life and the life of every person and thing on Luna. Supposing I refuse to help you?"

"That has occurred to me," Simar said blandly. He smiled as if he were enjoying the taste of something on his tongue. His eyes moved slowly to Nada. "I noticed that you are quite fond of our charming guest," he murmured. "That is the reason I brought her with us. She is the lever I may have to use on you—a very beautiful lever and a most effective one. If you don't cooperate, it will not be very pleasant for her. Has that occurred to *you*, Phillip Evans?"

"Don't listen to him, Phillip!" Nada cried. "He intends to kill us anyway after you have saved their city. I don't care what happens to me."

"Don't you, my child?" Simar said gently. "That is only because you have no idea of the refined tortures we have prepared for you." He glanced at Phillip and smiled. "You have seen my people? Probably they seem quite repugnant to you, but they are actuated by the same fundamental desires that motivate any thinking organism. They have impulses that are quite normal and moderate from their viewpoint. But—" He paused and chuckled softly. "I wonder if Miss Connors would think so?"

"You filthy beast!" Phillip spat the words out harshly. "You couldn't possibly be that rotten and corrupt."

"I might surprise you," Simar said. "At any rate, I am going to give you a few minutes to think this over. That is why I placed you in the same cell."

He stood up and walked to the door.

"I'll be back shortly for your decision. And remember, Miss Connors would be a dainty diversion for some lucky citizen of Lunas."

He bowed mockingly to them and stepped into the corridor, closing and locking the door behind him.

PHILLIP put his arm about Nada's shoulder and held her tightly.

"Don't worry, honey," he whispered. "Nothing like that is going to happen to you. I promise you that much."

"Why don't you agree to help them?" Nada asked. "They intend to kill us both, but that way you'd gain a little time. If you refuse to help them they may kill us immediately."

"I think maybe that's the best idea," Phillip said. He took a small knife from his pocket—his only weapon—and handed it to the girl.

"If anything happens to me," he said, "you know what to do with this."

Nada slipped the knife into the front of her tunic and nodded slowly.

"Yes, Phillip," she whispered, "I'll know what to do with it. And I won't be afraid."

"I know you won't," Phillip said. He patted her gently on the cheek and smiled into her eyes. "You've got everything it takes."

"Thanks," she said simply.

Phillip stepped to the cell door and called Simar.

"Have you reached a decision?" Simar asked mockingly.

"Yes, I have," Phillip said. "I'll help you."

CHAPTER VIII

THE force shield had been constructed at the edge of the city. When Simar and Phillip, escorted by a half dozen of the ropey-armed inhabitants of Lunas, reached the spot where it had been erected, a huge battery of brilliant lights was directed on the machine bringing it into sharp focus against the soft, velvet blackness of the Lunas night.

Phillip studied the machine with an engineer's practiced eye. It towered two dozen feet in the air and was easily twice that wide. From its flat, gleaming surface a dozen barrels pointed skyward like the menacing feelers of some giant bug.

A control panel and observation platform was reached by a narrow flight of iron steps.

"Come with me," Simar said. "There is no time to lose."

He led Phillip up the steps to the observation platform.

"The principle of the machine is simply a variation of ray projection," he explained. "These barrels throw a powerful ray screen miles into the air which, when magnetized, become as dense as the hardest metal. It should be sufficient to deflect the meteor storm. Your job is to make this machine work. Our scientists are completely unable to discover the flaw in its operation. That, as you know, is why you and Captain Malcolm were brought here."

"Bring me the necessary tools to tear this machine to the ground and I'll get to work," Phillip said, studying the control panel with narrowed, thoughtful eyes.

He worked steadily that night and the following morning, familiarizing himself with the construction and operation of the force shield machine. When the sun reached its zenith he was covered with grime and sweat and his face was pale and drawn with fatigue. He had inspected every square inch of the monster machine, had dug into every compartment, every housing and had re-checked the original designs and figures from which it had been built.

And he found nothing wrong.

Simar paced restlessly up and down the platform, occasionally glancing worriedly up in the direction the barrels of the machine were pointed.

"Have you found anything?" he asked for the dozenth time. His usually expressionless face was twisted now into a worried scowl as he peered over Phillip's shoulder.

"Get out of the light," Phillip said shortly. "When I find something, I'll let you know."

Simar stared at his back in baffled rage, then resumed his worried pacing.

"If you're trying to trick me," he snarled, "that wench of yours will curse you a thousand times before she dies."

Phillip had felt a return of his confidence as he saw Simar's anxiety. The creatures of Lunas were like robots, without emotion, without feeling, but Simar was as edgy as a cornered rat. With the human body he had stolen he had also acquired a complete set of human emotions.

"If I don't get this machine operating," he said grimly, "none of us will have any worries after tonight."

SIMAR glanced up at the sky. He was chewing his lower lip and his hands were shaky as he glanced at his watch.

"You haven't got much time," he said and his voice was tense.

"Where is Captain Malcolm?" Phillip asked.

"What difference does it make?" Simar said harshly. "Keep working on that machine."

"Captain Malcolm might be able to help me," Phillip said.

Simar paced the platform in silence, clenching and unclenching his hands.

"I'll have him brought here," he said finally.

One of the Lunasian creatures moved off immediately and returned a few moments later leading the dazed, glassy-eyed figure of the captain.

"He'll be no help!" Simar snapped.

Phillip shrugged. "Maybe not. But I wish you'd leave him here on the platform. The association with the machine might help restore his own consciousness. He was one of the most brilliant scientists on Earth. He could solve this problem in ten minutes."

"All right, all right," Simar said harshly, "let him stay here."

When the Lunasian released the captain he moved slowly, awkwardly to the control panel of the force field machine and ran his hands gently over the gleaming row of directional dials. A pleased, vague smile touched his face.

Phillip turned away, choking back the rage and bitterness in his heart. The fine, keen mind that had brought illumination to a thousand subjects was a dim, tragic thing now, its brilliance clouded forever.

"Hurry!" Simar's voice cracked like an angry whip about his ears. He was staring at the sky, his face pale with terror. "I think I can see the light of the meteor storm."

Two hours passed slowly and darkness was settling slowly on Luna. And as the darkness came the eastern sky was illumined by a cherry-red glow that seemed to emanate from the boundless wastes of space.

Sweat was standing out in tiny drops on Simar's forehead.

"The meteor swarm will be here in half an hour," he said, and his voice was thick with mounting terror. He wheeled on Phillip, his face savage. "Damn you!" he shouted. "You've tricked me."

Phillip didn't bother to look up. His fingers worked rapidly and desperately repairing a broken cable he had discovered but a moment before.

"Don't worry," he said bitterly, "your hide is saved, Simar."

"Have you found the trouble?" Simar asked tensely.

Phillip nodded. "I'll have it fixed in ten minutes."

An audible sigh of relief passed Simar's lips.

He straightened his shoulders and slowly the old expression of calm arrogance spread over his features. His eyes were again cold and hard.

PHILLIP worked as swiftly as possible but it was twenty minutes before he finally straightened and faced Simar. The eastern sky was a blazing red now and the heat from the onrushing billions of meteors was begining to grow uncomfortable.

"The machine's ready," he said.

Simar stepped to the control panel and snapped the three main connections into place, then threw the switch that sent sparks to the ray chamber.

Instantly a dozen solid rays of orange light flashed upward from the mouth of the barrels. When they passed through Luna's atmosphere they merged into a solid band of opaque light that widened as it moved void-ward to repel the meteors.

Simar watched the force shield for a moment and there was a cold expression of triumph on his face. He turned then and drew the ray tube from his belt and pointed it squarely at Phillip's chest.

"Your usefulness is over," he said. He smiled mockingly. "I didn't tell you all the details of my plan for I was

afraid you would refuse to cooperate, regardless of what I might do to you or the girl. You see," he continued, grinning sardonically, "the entire population of Lunas is to be transported into the future by time machines. Once there, we will have little difficulty in subjugating the entire Universe, and your precious Earth will be the first to feel the weight of our attacks. Lunas has waited long and patiently for its moment of supreme glory and it shall not be denied. I am going to kill you now, Phillip Evans. The girl I intend to keep alive, at least as long as she amuses me. When I tire of her charms I shall pass her on to one of the delightful creatures you have seen here on Lunas."

He laughed openly as Phillip took an involuntary step toward him, his face blazing with rage.

"You don't like that thought, do you?" he said jeeringly. "And you don't like the thought of an attack launched against an unsuspecting Earth that will cripple her beyond the threat of any possible retaliation. But don't worry too much about that. You won't be present to witness the destruction of your beloved Earth."

Phillip was tensed for the searing bolt from the ray tube, but from the corner of his eye he saw Captain Malcolm moving slowly, steadily toward Simar. And in the captain's eyes was a flickering gleam of awakened awareness.

"For Earth!" he said softly.

And as Simar wheeled toward the sound of the unexpected voice, Captain Malcolm threw himself in front of the ray tube—and died instantly as a searing livid bolt burned a clean hole through his forehead.

But Simar's shift of attention gave Phillip a million-to-one chance. And he took it.

He leaped in as Simar swung back to him and his right fist chopped down with a vicious, axe-like stroke that smashed into Simar's jaw with sickening force.

The ray tube slipped from his fingers as he fell backward, his jaw hanging queerly.

Phillip kicked the weapon across the platform and it dropped to the ground twenty feet below. He dodged the rush of one of the Lunasian creatures and sprang to the force-shield's control panel.

His arm rose and fell three times and the delicately wired, glass-encased panel smashed into a mass of tangled wreckage under the bludgeoning blows of his fists.

SIMAR scrambled to his feet and his face was wild with terror. Phillip turned from the wreckage of the control panel and laughed at him, bitterly, mockingly.

"Where are your mad dreams now?" he said harshly.

He glanced up at the angry red sky that seemed to be seething with wild violence as the meteor storm drew closer and closer to the doomed city of Lunas.

"There's your end, Simar," he snapped. "The force field is shattered beyond repair and in a few minutes there'll be nothing left of this area but a mass of molten ruins."

Simar stared at the crimson sky and his features worked fearfully. The heat from the approaching meteor storm was intense now and the very air seemed charged with the ominous feel of impending destruction.

The creatures of Lunas had scrambled from the base of the machine and were scurrying down the slope to their great city, driven by some desperate necessity to find safety in familiar surroundings.

The two men—Phillip and Simar—were left alone on the observation platform of the ruined machine.

Phillip was smiling grimly as he walked toward the fear-crazed Simar.

"We'll be dead in a few minutes," he said, "but I want the pleasure of wringing your neck before I go out."

Simar backed away from him, his lips foam-flecked with terror. Suddenly he wheeled and dashed for the steps that led to the ground. Phillip leaped after him, but he was too late. Simar reached the steps first, plunged down them three at a time and started the slope toward the city at a wild, terror-driven run.

He was a hundred yards away before Phillip realized the reason behind his mad flight.

The time machine!

Simar would know where the machine was and he was heading for it, striving desperately to save himself from the death that was hurtling at the city from the skies.

Phillip dropped to the ground and started after him. Simar had a long lead but Phillip forced himself until his lungs were at the bursting point, and gradually he cut the distance between them, until, when they reached the city, he was but fifty yards behind him.

The frantic creatures of Lunas paid not the slightest attention to the running men. They had collected in the streets of the city and were staring at the sullen red sky with a hopeless apathy. They awaited their death with a queer blend of terror and fatalism.

When Simar reached the great palace building he rushed through the gate and by the time Phillip reached the mammoth throne room he had disappeared.

But there was only one other exit from the room and Phillip headed for it without breaking his stride.

He charged through the door, and something crashed into the side of his head with stunning force. He fell to his knees, blinded by the blow.

"You fool!" Simar's harsh voice grated in his ears.

PHILLIP tried to rise, but Simar's foot crashed into his face, sprawling him to the floor. He heard dimly the sound of Simar's retreating foot steps, but before he could crawl to his feet the sound had died away and he was alone in a wide corridor that stretched endlessly ahead.

He started down the corridor at a half-trot, disregarding the hammering pain in his skull. His heart was pounding frantically. He had to find Nada and he had to stop Simar from leaving with the time machine—and in a matter of seconds a million tons of molten death would strike the city of Lunas, burying it forever.

He staggered on desperately, half-sobbing and half-blinded with pain, until he could go no further; his knees buckled and he fell forward on his face.

He lay there for a moment and the rest was like paradise. A delicious weariness flooded him and the darkness in front of his eyes grew deeper and blacker.

He made no move to rise. His muscles were like tangled, twisted rope. He had tried. He had done everything possible. There was no longer any use fighting. He couldn't even move.

A high-pitched scream of terror sounded faintly in his ears, and it cut through the fog of weariness like a clean, sharp knife.

With a strength he didn't know he possessed he climbed to his feet and staggered in the direction of that sound. It had been close and as he stumbled forward he listened for a repetition of the sound. But no other sound broke the stillness.

He charged on like a drunken man and if he hadn't lost his balance and reeled against the wall, he would have passed by a door that fitted perfectly into the wall and that swung open as his weight pressed against it.

He twisted to keep from falling and plunged into a small room, outfitted as a laboratory.

"Phillip!"

The voice was to his side. He swung about and saw Nada struggling in Simar's arms. One of Simar's hands grasped the handhold of the gleaming time machine and with the other he was attempting to force Nada's fingers about one of the three remaining handholds.

"Damn you!" Simar shouted harshly, as he saw Phillip's staggering figure. He grabbed a heavy metal bar from the table and sprang toward him, but Nada twisted and stuck her foot in his path. He stumbled and fell, his face disfigured with insane rage.

And before his wildly twisting body could strike the floor Phillip stepped in and slugged him with every ounce of his weight and strength behind the blow.

Simar fell, and when he struck the floor he didn't move.

Phillip stepped over his body and grabbed the handhold of the time machine.

"Hang on, honey," he said.

HE threw the switch and instantly the orange cone of light appeared, bathing the gleaming machine with its brilliance.

There was a loud, roaring noise above them that grew steadily in volume. The heat was intolerable in the small room.

"How much time do we have?" Nada asked.

Phillip started to speak but a screaming, whistling roar drowned his words.

"The comets have struck the moon's atmosphere," he said. "We have about five seconds."

Darkness, unreal and ghostly suddenly dropped over the room. A vast suction plucked at them and a new noise smashed against their eardrums.

"Hurry, hurry," Nada cried, and her voice held a prayer.

A roaring, crashing crescendo of noise broke about them and they felt the floor beneath their feet tremble suddenly as if a giant's fist had smashed against it. A great fissure broke in the wall and a section of the heavy ceiling fell dangerously close to them, crumbling the floor beneath its weight.

And at that instant, as the heavy walls began to crumble, they felt the suddent powerful suction lifting them upward, and then the darkness closed about them, as the mighty palace of the Lunasians dissolved in a fiery hail of thousand ton meteors.

CHAPTER IX

PHILLIP regained consciousness slowly. He glanced to one side and saw Nada lying beside him and when he climbed to one knee he recognized the surroundings as the laboratory of the *Astra*.

A deep feeling of relief swept over him. Simar was dead, the Lunasian city had been destroyed and he and Nada were safe.

But there still remained a big job to be done.

He revived Nada and when she looked around her eyes were suddenly wet. "I can't believe we're safe," she whispered.

He helped her to her feet and held her close to him.

"We're safe, but there's still work to be done," he said. "Before we leave Luna I intend to blast the valley of

the Lunasian city to dust. That should release the disembodied life forces that are clinging to the area like some hateful miasma. I won't feel really safe until that's done. As long as there remains the possibility of the life forces taking possession of human bodies I would never rest easy. I'm going to give the orders immediately."

He pressed a button on the lab bench that sent a signal through the ship for Eric Marmon, the third in charge, to report to the laboratory.

Marmon arrived a few minutes later and he looked surprised to see them. He was a small wiry man, with piercing blue eyes and dark hair.

"Where have you been?" he asked. "We thought you and the captain were out on a private scouting party."

"Nothing like that," Phillip said. He didn't intend to tell anyone his story until the valley had been blasted and they were safely away from Luna. "I want you to order every available man to assist you in preparing the valley for immediate blasting. Spray liquid explosive over the entire area and we'll detonate it when we take off. Understand, I don't want any man to go into the valley for any reason. Is that clear?"

"Why, yes," Marmon said, "but it sounds rather odd. Where is Captain Malcolm?"

Phillip thought of the captain's last action and he said slowly, "I don't really know, but I am sure he'd be satisfied with what we're doing. Will you get on it right away, Marmon?"

Marmon nodded agreement and left the room.

"I'm going to change," Phillip said to Nada, "then I'll be outside keeping an eye on the job. Would you like to watch the work?"

"I'd love to," Nada said. "I'll join you outside in a few minutes."

PHILLIP changed into clean clothes and it was fifteen minutes later when he stepped out of the ship. A dozen of the crew were setting up the explosive sprayers which were capable of drenching a twenty-five mile area in a matter of minutes.

The liquid explosive was pumped under compression and the huge nozzles of the sprayer pointed upward at about the angle of an artillery mortar.

Marmon was in charge. Phillip glanced at the gauges on the three huge tanks of explosives and then checked the angle of the nozzles and the automatic regulator devices. Everything was in perfect order, but the rest of the crew was not in evidence.

He glanced at Marmon.

"Where are the rest of the men? I told you to put the entire crew to work on this."

Marmon had been staring at the ground with a faint smile on his lips and when he looked up Phillip felt a chill of horror as he saw the man's glazed, sullen eyes.

He shot a quick glance at the man standing behind Marmon and he saw the same glazed expression, the same vacant stare that Captain Malcolm had worn.

These men were possessed by the life forces that emanated from the valley of the Lunasian city!

Marmon was still smiling at him with cold, glazed eyes.

"Don't you know me?" he said softly. "You left me lying for dead on the floor of the Aganda's palace in Lunas just a short while ago."

Simar!

Phillip drew a sharp breath.

Yes, there was no doubt of it. Somehow Simar had bridged the gap in time! His life force had lived in the buried ruins of Lunas and was now in possession of Marmon.

"You asked about the crew," the man he had known as Marmon said softly. "They are aboard the *Astra*, chained in the brig. You are going back to the *Astra* and seal the hatchways, Mr. Evans. Are you curious about what is going to happen to you? I won't keep you in suspense. We are going to turn the explosive spray on the *Astra* and blow it and everyone aboard clear to hell. Now, start back for the *Astra!*"

A ray gun appeared in Marmon's hand and he gestured viciously toward the ship. Phillip backed slowly away from the group of men and he saw that they were swinging the nozzles of the explosive spray to bear on the *Astra*.

His mind was racing furiously, but he could think of nothing that might save the situation. He stepped aboard the *Astra* and he saw Marmon raise his hand and shout an order to the men at the explosive spray.

But before they could move one of the mighty atomic cannons in the nose of the *Astra* swung swiftly about in its turret; an orange blast billowed from its muzzle and the man that had been Marmon was blown into nothingness by the tremendous charge. The cannon swung again, another blast ripped from its muzzle and the group at the explosive sprayer disappeared into fragments.

PHILLIP slammed the hatch door and ran down the corridor to the firing tower of the ship. He found Nada behind one of the huge atomic cannons. Her head was buried in her arms and she was sobbing.

"I had to do it," she moaned. "I found the crew in the brig but I couldn't get them out."

Phillip patted her on the shoulder.

"It was the only thing to do," he said.

He glanced out the steel-enforced window and he saw that the second blast had swung the explosive sprayers about and that great streams of liquid were spraying over the valley. A pool of the tremendously explosive liquid had already collected in the basin of the valley and Phillip knew that soon the entire depression would be completely innundated.

He stepped to the control panel and discharged the rear rockets. As the *Astra* began to tremble under the swiftly building power, he moved to the breech of the atomic cannon and fired a blast directly into the collecting pool of high explosives in the basin of the valley.

The *Astra* blasted off with a whistling roar of power, streaking void-ward with its rockets leaving trailing pin-points of light gleaming in the thin atmosphere of Luna.

And below the valley of the Lunasian city exploded with a tremendous, cataclysmic roar that heaved the relics of the eon-old city miles into the air; and the undead life forces of the ancient, evil city died then—a hundred thousand years after their appointed time.

Phillip and Nada watched the explosion in the rear visi-screen.

When the terrific velocity of the *Astra* carried them beyond the range of Luna, Phillip glanced down at the girl in his arms and smiled. Nada started to speak but suddenly she found her lips occupied with other matters.

THE END

GIVE YOUR MONEY "LEBENSRAUM"
USE IT TO BUY WAR BONDS
PRESERVE YOUR OWN LIVING SPACE

MASTER OF THE LIVING DEAD

By ED EARL REPP

Steve thought the advertisement was a joke. But he changed his mind when Merl Blair lost face—literally!

"TAKE a look at the story I've got marked out on page one, beautiful!" Steve Mallory spread a newspaper out on the lunch room table in front of Merl Blair. "That classified ad I told you about sometime ago has broken into the news columns."

Like many New Yorkers who sought escape from the mad, banging clatter of Times Square, the young couple had come to Danny's Restaurant for lunch and a quiet hour together. Here the shrilling of police whistles, the clamor of traffic, the snarling whine of sirens and a thousand-odd other instruments grinding out a symphony of noise were muted by the efficient sound-proofing of the popular eating place. It was said in praise that in a rear booth you didn't have to yell through a megaphone to be heard across the table.

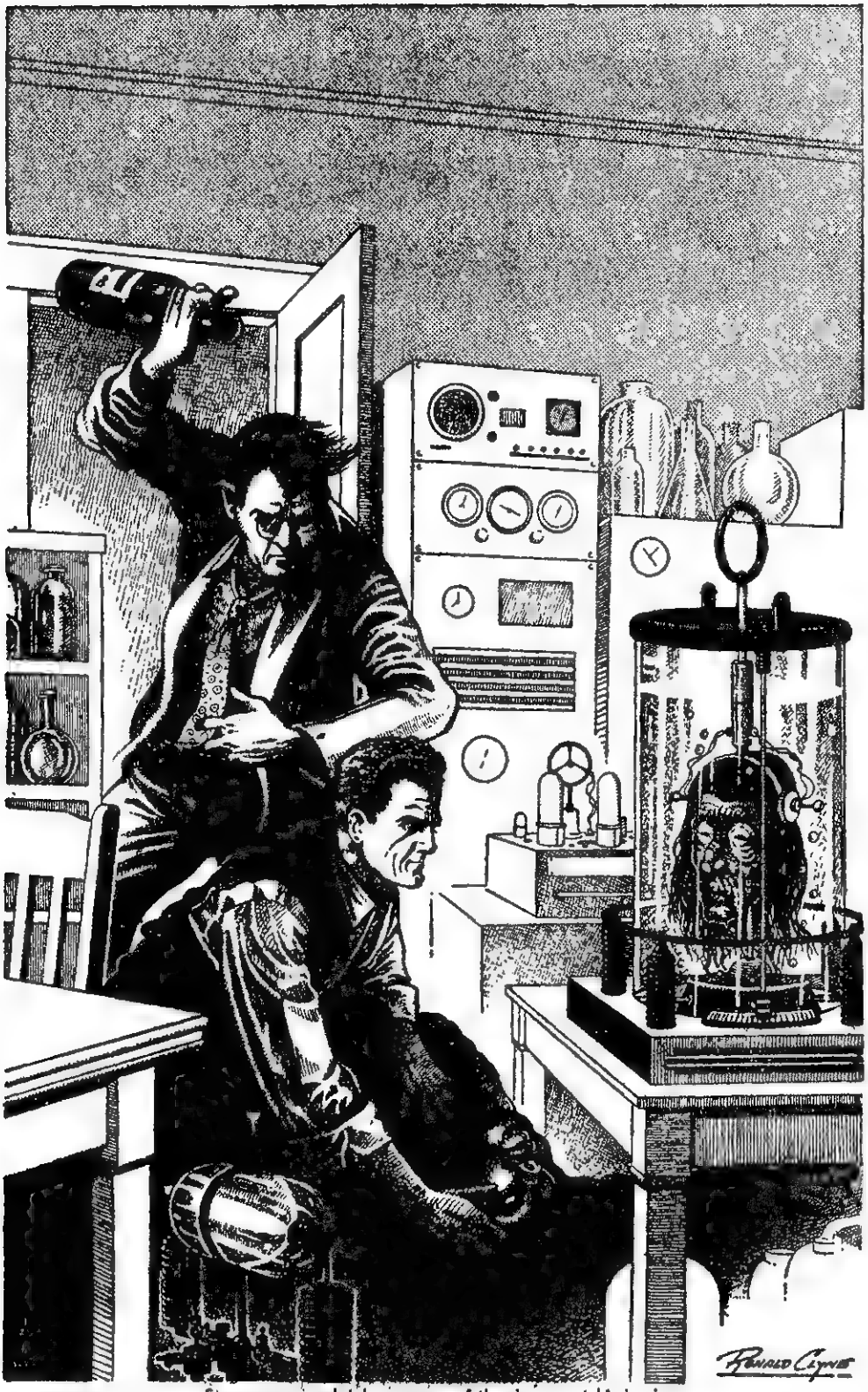
Steve and Merl frequently went there when he could get away from the paper long enough and she could leave Acme Insurance for a time in the hands of the company president. Of course you had to pay dearly for such privacy and quiet. But being young and in love they liked to pretend that a young reporter could afford such luxuries for the girl who was going to be his wife. Yet both knew that as private secretary to H. A. McCafferty, she earned almost twice as much as he did as a twenty-five-dollar-a-week newshawk.

Merl Blair, brunette, blue-eyed and trim in her neat tweed business suit, picked up the newspaper to glance intently over the two-column box in the lower right hand corner. A little frown furrowed her forehead as she read the words within the square.

"The ad is still running, is it?" she said without looking up. "I thought it was a joke or a patent medicine advertisement with a new angle."

"That's what we figured at first," Steve said, breaking open a French roll, "but police headquarters is getting interested. It smacks of skullduggery."

Merl's eyes, accustomed to reading insurance policies rapidly, swept with growing interest over the article. At the top of the box was a reprint of the mysterious advertisement that had been running in all the metropolitan dailies for almost a year. It read:



Steve was completely unaware of the danger at his back

NEW BODIES FOR OLD!

Are you young in spirit and desires, but old in body? Does a seventy-year-old face deny you the companionship of young people? If so, you are being cheated of the things science and skill can give you. A new process has enabled a select number of men and women to become fifty years younger. If you would like to exchange the ugliness of old age for the beauty and vitality of youth—without plastic surgery—write Box 34, this newspaper, for particulars.

Merl looked up with a musical laugh. "It makes the Fountain of Youth sound like a fish pond, doesn't it?" she commented.

"You haven't read anything yet, Sugar," Steve grinned. "Read it all—carefully. I wrote it."

Again her eyes dropped to the paper and she read the article beneath the ad slowly and half aloud to grasp its full import.

"For the past two years the larger New York papers have carried this advertisement. And now, on the heels of several unexplained disappearances, the police are endeavoring to find out if there is any connection between the missing persons and the advertisement.

"All replies to 'Box 34' are answered by a pamphlet left in care of the newspapers. The pamphlet is still more incredible. It warns prospective customers to be prepared to spend large amounts of money, and to furnish references. If the beauty seekers are still not frightened away, they are instructed to do the following strange things: Insert a classified ad stating the exact hour that they will be ready for a call from 'Mr. Jones'. Rent a house for a month and have installed therein a short wave transmitter. Have a telephone installed. At the hour they have stated they will be ready for the advertiser's call, sent out on a certain wave-length the number of their telephone.

"Dauntless even in the face of these instructions, police investigators have followed them to the letter. Each time, within fifteen seconds of their giving the phone number to 'Mr. Jones' in this roundabout way, they have had a call from him.

"The prospect is asked his name, his address, his telephone number. He is then warned to leave the house immediately, before police, who will also have picked up his telephone number on the short wave can have time to trace the number and pick him up.

"However, the mysterious Mr. Jones has never called any of the police investigators. Apparently he does some investigating of his own. Whatever the answer, police admit that they are no nearer the solution than they were before they tackled the problem. For the time being it remains one of Manhattan's strangest puzzles."

MERL'S lips broke suddenly into an amused smile. "What some people won't do for a joke!" she laughed.

Steve took a bite of the roll. "I don't know about that joke business," he mused. "There's hundreds of people with money who would give plenty to have a beautiful face. And there are plenty of others who need a change of face just as bad, only they don't seem to know it."

"Meaning me, I suppose?" Merl said crisply. She laid her fork down and reached for her hat, her lips set in a tight line.

"Hey, not so fast!" Steve stopped her. "I make a harmless remark and you turn it into an insult. Still, I ought to know by now that everything I say is eventually used against me. What I meant was people like old Hatchet Face that runs your apartment house."

The girl laid her hat down again.

"Well, that's better," she said severely. "Besides, I may look terrible right now, but you'll have to admit by tonight that I've been gloriously transformed. I got the whole afternoon off just to get myself made over for our Saturday night splurge."

Steve looked interested. "Going to wear that blue dress I like?"

Merl shook her head. She placed her elbows on the table, cupped her chin in her hands and said radiantly, "I'm going to be rejuvenated from head to foot. New dress, new shoes, new everything. Then I'm going to the beauty parlor for the rest of the day. I'll be wearing a white flower in my buttonhole so you'll know me."

And so, in the dozens of little things that required telling about her new outfit, the subject of the strange advertisement was lost. But back in Steve's mind there still lurked a suspicion that was not quite covered up. He was more intrigued by the problem than he had admitted. For there seemed to be a certain relation between the strange disappearance of several persons lately and the ad. A relation that even the police could not explain, nor Steve, whose paper had had him on the job from time to time.

Time passed swiftly. Suddenly Steve shot a look at his wrist watch. "Good night!" he exclaimed. "I'm due at the office ten minutes ago. I'll see you tonight at the apartment—eight o'clock. Gonna be on time for once?"

Without waiting for a retort, he grabbed the check and headed for the door. A jangle of noise swept through the door as it swung behind him, and then he was gone.

FOUR o'clock found Merl still busily scanning shop-windows. Her trim little figure, supple in an attractive gray suit, moved from window to window, apparently aimlessly; then, suddenly, she would disappear into a door and reappear with a new bundle.

It was just after she decided to cut her shopping tour short that she noticed the man watching her. As she shot a swift glance at him, she realized she had seen him behind her for some time. She was puzzled when he smiled and tipped his hat.

She frowned as her mind groped for remembrance of him. He was about six feet tall, with wide, bony shoulders and thin hips. His skin had a pink, well-massaged look. He wore a well-fitting dark suit and a derby. At first glance he looked like any prosperous stock-broker, but something in his face gave the lie to his prosaic appearance. His eyes were a frigid luminous green, his brows black and heavy. A broad, flat nose overhung a mouth which, in spite of its present smile, wore a contemptuous look. There was nothing on which the girl could pin her instant dislike of him, but she had the feeling that no matter what his face expressed, his mind would be disdainful. While she was still considering him, he stepped from the curb and approached her.

Something about him compelled her to wait for him. His voice was faintly mocking as he smiled, "I believe we have a mutual acquaintance."

"I—I don't believe so," the girl faltered. She was on the point of walking away when he touched her arm and pointed across the sidewalk.

"Have you forgotten that gentleman?" he asked.

Merl's eyes flashed to the spot he indicated. Abruptly, she winced and a little cry escaped her as something pricked her arm where he had touched her. In a flash she whirled on him. "I don't know you, and I don't know him!" she flared. "What's more, I—I—"

Then she stopped. She raised her hand and passed it across her brow. She felt a strange lassitude seeping through her body. Suddenly she wanted to relax and just wander along lazily not thinking, not struggling. She felt as though she would rather someone else did her thinking for her. This man, for instance.

The man seemed agreeable to the idea too, for his disdainful lips parted momentarily to breathe, "My car is at the curb. Won't you let me take you home?"

Merl nodded. Unresisting, she allowed herself to be helped into the coupe and driven off. The sedan headed swiftly down Broadway, until it was swallowed up in the hundreds of other automobiles which surged back and forth down the thoroughfare. One of her bundles still lay on the sidewalk where she had dropped it.

CHAPTER II

The Living Dead

THERE was something empty, something far-off about the sound of the doorbell as Steve pressed it that night. It didn't sound the way a doorbell should, somehow. But maybe it was the fact that there was no noisy little tattoo of high heels as soon as its summons ceased.

Mallory leaned against the wall by the door and grinned vacantly at the cellophane florist's-box he held between his flattened palms. Inside it, resplendent beneath its gleaming cover, lay a single white orchid.

After a moment he shoved his thumb against the button once more. Again the far-off ring of the bell. And still no answering heels or cry of, "Hold your horses, mister! I'll be right there."

Frowning a little, Steve Mallory pressed the button a third time. He waited, then knocked loudly and called, "Merl! Are you in there?"

There was no answer. Cold fear gripped at Steve's vitals. An unnamed dread lay hold of his senses and paralyzed him for a moment. Then he shook off the feeling and pounded louder. This time he got a reply.

Down the hall a klaxon-like voice rang out, "I'll trouble yez to keep yer shoutin' an' hallooin' fer the streets, Mr. Mallory! If the young lady ain't in, why don't yez stay at home fer a change?" Mrs. Sewell, buxom and red-haired, stood with her arms crossed before her door and nodded viciously to emphasize her managerial authority.

Steve swung around and strode hurriedly towards the woman. "Did she leave any word for me?" he asked, ignoring her tirade.

"Nary a word," the manager told him. "Now, why don't yez run along an' . . ."

"But I had a date at eight o'clock with her." Steve frowned. "It's not like her to leave me waiting this way. Do you have an extra key?"

Mrs. Sewell sighed resignedly. "Very well," she gave in. "Here's the key, an' bring it back when you're convinced she ain't there."

Steve hurried back and let himself in. He stood in the doorway for a moment looking, tight-lipped, about the apartment. There was no sign of Merl's having been home since he talked to her. No bundles, no strings on the floor from packages hastily opened. He went through the three rooms hurriedly and finally stood in the middle of the room and bit his lip thoughtfully.

Cold fear was creeping up his spine. Why hadn't she been home? Saturday night was their big night, when they took in dinner and then a show, or perhaps a dance. She lived alone, so there

was no one to give him any clues as to where she might have stayed. But eight o'clock! She should have been home by six.

He thought of everything that might have happened to her. Accidents. Sudden sickness. Amnesia. With a muttered curse he shook off the fears and strode to the telephone. He knew a few of the girl's friends, and he sat down to call them.

It was half an hour before he gave up. At the end of that time he knew not a thing more than he had. With a sudden wave of realization he knew that Merl was gone—that his fears had not been groundless, or he would have located her somewhere. Frantically he dialed police headquarters and told them the facts, gave a detailed description of the girl. Steve Mallory was well-known at headquarters, and well-liked. He received the desk sergeant's promise to do all that could possibly be done for him.

White-faced and a little shaken, he locked the apartment again and took a taxi to the *Herald* office. Tom Noble, city editor on the paper, was the best friend Steve had, despite the discrepancy in their ages and the fact that Noble was his boss. He sought him instinctively now, knowing Noble's shrewd mind would ferret out the essential facts needed to find the girl.

NOBLE was still at his desk in the city room, his stout body tipped back in the chair, coat open, vest undone. A puzzled smile came over his face when he saw the boy back again. He scratched his head through thinning white hair. "What brings you here, Steve? Thought this was your night with Merl?"

"Tom! She's gone!" Steve blurted, standing over his desk and staring down intensely.

"Gone!" Noble asked incredulously. Then a grin softened the sudden harsh lines of his face. "I get it. Two-timing you for some other guy, eh?"

"Oh, God, I only wish she were!" the boy groaned. Hurriedly he went on to blurt out the whole story. He concluded frantically, "Where can she be, Tom? She wouldn't stand me up like this on purpose."

Noble tapped thoughtfully on the desk top with a pencil point. "I don't know," he replied quietly. "You've called the police?"

"Everybody. All her friends, her boss—everybody I know who'd have any ideas." On a sudden thought he stiffened. "Tom! You don't suppose —that ad—the one about new bodies, pretty faces for old ones—"

Noble laughed softly. "Oh, now, don't get so excited, my boy," he advised kindly. "That ad is nothing but a joke, in my opinion. Or else it's a trick of some crooks for communicating important information. That would be an absolutely fool-proof system."

"But maybe it's not a joke! Maybe —maybe white slaves, or—God knows what."

Noble shoved back from the desk and pulled out a bottom drawer. "Steve," he said sternly, "I've got what you need right here. I save it for occasions like this. You're going to put about four fingers down and then you're going to relax and sit right here until we get a call from headquarters saying they found her asleep in some theater, where she went after shopping. White slaves ——! Why with an imagination like that, you'll be doing a syndicated column in no time!"

FOR an hour after the man had accosted her on the street, Merl was in a fog of strange lassitude and mental sleepiness. When at last she came out

of it, she thought, for one shocked instant, that she was still in a nightmare. Huddled in a chair, she sent an incredulous glance about her, trying to piece the crazy-quilt facts she remembered into a complete story.

She was in a corner of a big, white-walled room. At the corner to her right the room jutted out into a large, circular alcove which seemed to be a supply room. At her left, diametrically across from the supply room, was another alcove full of strange apparatus and webbed with glass tubes. Straight ahead of her, in fact taking the whole room in one glance, she saw that it was completely bare. But in the very center of the place there was a large, rectangular, glassed-over section beneath which she could see machinery and two operating tables. There were steps leading down to this, though they were cut off now by the glass shield over the sub-floor room.

The girl saw no one, nor heard anyone, so after a moment she stood up and moved down towards the alcove to the left. As she drew closer to it, she felt a cold wave of revulsion sweep her. At first, not seeing anything to base her sensation of disgust upon, she thought it was simply fear. Then, as she stood in the very entrance to the place—she understood.

In the center of the room was a large glass apparatus consisting of two great cylinders side by side, with a maze of hundreds of thread-like glass tubes leading from them. One of the tanks was filled with a clear liquid; the other was a dark red. Some of the tubes leading from them appeared to be empty because of the transparency of the liquid they carried. Others were dark, like the tank on the right. The level of the liquids changed constantly, surging up and down, up and down, regularly.

A small battery of black machinery ringed about the tanks accounted for this motion, apparently. But it was the contents of the glass globes on shelves that lined the semi-circular wall of the alcove that made Merl shudder.

Straight across from her she thought she made out human heads within the fishbowl-like containers! They were old and wrinkled, with scraggly hair drifting before the faces like undersea growths surging to and fro. The eyes were wide open, and Merl decided they must be lidless. Then to her horror she saw one of the heads blink its eyes exactly like a live head would! The eyes glanced about, stopped on the girl's shuddering form, then moved on restlessly.

"Good Heavens!" she gasped, her hand flying to her throat.

In other bowls she saw human hands drifting slightly in the liquid that filled them. She saw one bowl entirely filled with little white globes that could be only one thing—human eyes! There was a foot in another container, a forearm in still another. Suddenly the girl went cold. Her stomach seemed to drop and her legs felt weak. But before her shocked senses could recoil completely before the gruesome sight, and leave her lying senseless on the floor, a voice brought her whirling about.

"A very interesting display, don't you think?" the man said tauntingly. "I can assure you that you will not find anything like it anywhere else in the world."

Merl's widened, terror-filled eyes flashed over the form of the man who had abducted her. But now he was dressed in a surgeon's smock, and was wearing rubber gloves. Behind him stood a huge, black-thatched man in a similar outfit.

"What do you mean by bringing me here?" she flared suddenly, anger wash-

ing the fear from her heart. "If you've kidnaped me, I can promise you you won't get a cent. I have no relatives, and no one with any money to pay you."

"My dear young woman, you wrong me. I am no kidnaper. I am what you might call a—substitutional plastic surgeon." The man wrung his hands briskly.

Something in his tones brought the cold terror back into Merl's heart again. She licked her lips and tried to speak, but this time the words would not come.

"Now, you needn't be frightened, young woman," the man said severely. "If you have any ideas that I might be wanting to add you to my collection, here, don't worry yourself about that. Nor am I trying to get money from you. Quite the contrary—I intend to make you one of the wealthiest women in New York!"

MERL BLAIR clenched her small fists and faced him, white-lipped, determined to find out what she was faced with. "Will you please tell me what you want with me?" she demanded. "Who are you? And what do you mean by that—making me one of the richest women in New York?"

She looked very small, very frightened, and yet very pretty as she stood before the two men and waited for a reply. The abductor noticed it, for he turned to his helper and smiled, "I think Mrs. Van Gogh will be very pleased with her, don't you, Krishner? Exactly the type she ordered."

Krishner, the lumpy man who stood behind him, nodded and muttered something unintelligible.

Now the other man turned to the girl rather briskly. "But it is cruel to keep you in the dark like this. First—let me introduce myself. I am Dr. Eric Sturvison. You may remember I was relieved of my license some five years ago for what was termed 'dangerous and distasteful experimentation on human bodies.' To prove how utterly wrong they were, I have gone on with my work and perfected a method for making old men and women as beautiful as the young."

"Then you are the man who runs that ad!" Merl accused.

"Exactly. And to show you how much I mean it, let me show you something." He took the girl's arm and led her to the center of the room, to the very edge of the glassed-in cubicle below. Merl flinched at his touch, but she knew how useless resistance would be. Her whole being shuddered at the thought of looking down there, but she finally brought her gaze down through the glass into the operating room below.

A little cry escaped her. Her shocked gaze took in the form of an old woman lying on one of two operating tables, covered from foot to neck with a sheet. Her face was wrinkled and seamed, yellowed with age and drawn. The lips drew in about the mouth over toothless gums. Her eyes were closed in sleep.

"The lady is Mrs. Van Gogh," Sturvison said. "One of the wealthiest patients I have attended yet. She grew so homely and old that she finally decided to submit to my treatment. The face she selected was to be oval shaped, blue eyed, brown haired, smooth of complexion. Type number 13, to be specific. In other words—your own type!"

The girl fell back in terror as the whole, ghastly idea penetrated her frozen consciousness. She felt the big, hard hands of Krishner close on her shoulders, p i n n i n g her helplessly against him.

Sturvison come closer to her, his cold green eyes glaring at her with fanatical intensity. "I think you understand now," he said tightly. "Your own head is to be removed from your lovely shoul-

ders and placed on the shrivelled, stooped—but wealthy—body of the hag down in the operating chamber! No, I am not mad," he said, as her eyes told him the thoughts in her mind. "Unless you call it mad to prefer making a hundred thousand dollars for an operation such as this to giving my discovery to the scientific world—the scientific world that turned me out in the cold. In the two years I have been working here, I have amassed a little fortune of one and one-half million dollars."

Terror held Merl rigid as he went on quickly. He was talking now with a boastful tone in his voice, taking this opportunity to flaunt his discoveries before a helpless victim.

"You will notice the odd arrangement of the two operating tables," he said. "They are placed head to head for convenience. Between them you see a flat, enameled wheel, placed so that it cuts off the right corner of one table and the corresponding corner of the other. Your head will lie on one part of the wheel, and Mrs. Van Gogh's on the other, diametrically opposite. At the proper time, I press a switch, and the wheel makes one-half revolution—faster than the eye can see. When the wheel stops, Mrs. Van Gogh will have the head of a beautiful girl—while you, my dear, will be possessed of the toothless head of a hag! But you will not be forced to meet the world with such a face. You will be placed in my 'body bank,' where I retain such bodies as yours for future use. Suspended animation preserves beautiful bodies for me until the time when I am able to perform other operations than this one."

He spoke sharply to Krishner. "The needle," he clipped. Without waiting for a response, he turned and pressed a switch on the floor. The glass shield slid back and left the cubicle free to their entrance. Sturvison went down the steps.

Again there was a slight stab in the girl's arm. She cried out, tried to slide from Krishner's grip. And then the deadly lassitude came down over her and held her powerless. The giant helper picked her up in his arms, carried her down the steps, and laid her on the operating table.

CHAPTER III

Voice from the Grave

FOR Merl the next five minutes were a ghastly nightmare. It was like one of those dreams in which one knows he is sleeping, and yet cannot awake. But not for a second did she lose consciousness. Sturvison hovered over her threateningly, his harsh voice crackling in her ears like an electric arc.

"I have one of my less successful fellow-scientists to thank for the success I myself have had," he told her, almost boastfully. "Were it not for the discovery of Dr. Schwartz of the Carnegie Institution that the brains of earthworms lose their memories in the process of transplantation, I might never have conceived the idea of transplanting human heads from one body to the other.* But that interesting fact reassured me about something. No human being upon whom I operated could ever remember anything about the operation! Thus I am always perfectly protected. When your head is on Mrs. Van Gogh's shoulders, your brain will have no recollection of anything prior to the operation. I will inform her of all the facts she needs to know regarding her past life. Within two weeks she will be ready to re-enter society. And your own body will be saved by suspended animation

* Free, E. E., "New Bodies for Old," *American Weekly*, April 10, 1938.

for future use—in my 'body bank'."

Sturvision smiled bleakly and started to lay out a few simple surgical instruments on the table beside him. But he did not remain silent for long. His scientific being, starved for the companionship of men of his caliber, whose society had been denied him because of his own experiments, was now preening itself in half-boastful, half-didatic explanations.

"My work here is not new," he went on slowly. "For years men have been working towards the end I have achieved. Heymans managed to keep a dog's head alive as much as twenty-five years ago. Giersberg, of the University of Breslau, transplanted the brains of tadpoles successfully. Professor Hans Przibram, at the University of Vienna, has even managed to transplant the heads of certain grasshopper-like insects and restore the insects to complete normalcy.

"But this was nothing compared to the task that faced me if I were ever to see my dreams realized. I had to manage to transplant human heads in the space of time it takes a heart to beat. Less than a second, in other words. It must be done so fast that no blood can be lost. That is the purpose of the wheel upon which your head is resting—beside that of this wealthy hag. But even the lightning action of this machine will not suffice to maintain life if the arteries are severed. Hence—" Sturvison exhibited several feet of transparent, flexible tubing to the girl. "—artificial veins, you might call them. Before I separate your head from your body, I transfer the flow of blood from your veins and arteries to the corresponding ones of this woman, by means of these tubes. After the operation, they shrink and dissolve, leaving the veins perfectly healed. So you see, even before the operation takes place, your blood is pumping through her head, and hers through yours."

Now he turned swiftly and took two odd-looking masks from the operating-room closet a short distance away. Merl's eyes watched him helplessly. Terror had left her numb. She seemed to see and hear these things with an air of detachment, as though she were separated from her body. With the awful implication of that thought, her mind rushed to the thing that was being done to her. It was incredulous, impossible to believe—that her own head was to be put on the old woman's body, and the wealthy woman's head on hers. She shuddered as she thought of going through life with a body already old, a body horrible to look at. Her mind recoiled from thinking of the effect it would have on Steve to see her like this. Then the lumbering assistant's face loomed over her, and brought her back to the things at hand.

Krishner was wearing one of the masks Sturvison had just procured. His blocky face looked unearthly behind the gleaming goggles and the gray rubber mask. The mask puffed and relaxed, puffed and relaxed, with his breathing. A small tank was strapped to his chest now. Before she could move, a set of straps were thrown across her breasts, holding her tightly on the table. Her arms and legs were then secured in the same manner.

STURVISON strode quickly across the small room to a switchboard near the steps. He threw a knife switch in. Instantly the glass shield over the room slid closed. Then he returned to the table and fixed a mask onto Merl's face. The touch of the scientist's cold, moist hands repelled her, but she was utterly powerless to fight now.

His voice came to her with a soft,

muffled tone, deadened by layers of mask material. "A necessary precaution, though somewhat awkward for Krishner and myself. Ordinary germicides are useless in such an operation as this. The entire room must be filled with an antiseptic gas." As he spoke, he reached beneath the operating tables and turned on a tank of compressed gas. In a matter of seconds the room was filled with swirling green layers of poisonous gas.

Like undersea monsters, barely seen in the gloom, Krishner and Sturvison moved about, adjusting the bodies of Merl and the old woman to exact spots on the tables. The adjustments were checked and rechecked, for this was the most important part of the operation. When the wheel spun, the heads must be in exactly the right position to fit onto their new bodies.

Now the two surgeons—Sturvison quick and sure, Krishner plodding and acting as though he worked by mental order from the scientist—swung from the head of each table a shining, heavy knife that pivoted on an axis close to each woman's head. With a single, swift motion, the knives would do their work, and as they flashed through the slots beneath the subjects' necks, a switch would be tripped which would revolve the wheel. A few pin-pricks told Merl that the artificial veins were being installed.

Merl's lips parted as though she would cry out, but she made no sound. The gas in her own mask was not pure air. Slowly and steadily insensibility was seeping through her body. Her eyelids felt heavy and her breath seemed to come more slowly with every drawn gasp. Over her body hung the ghastly, masked face of Dr. Sturvison, faintly seen through the drifting swirls of green vapor. He clipped an order to Krishner, and the giant's shoulders bulged as he prepared to swing his knife through the Van Gogh's woman's neck.

The girl's slim body tensed against the straps that held her powerless. With one last effort she managed a scream through her bloodless lips. But the sound was weak, scarcely carrying to the scientist. Then, as consciousness fled from her, she saw Sturvison's face distort. He snapped, *"Now!"*

The last thing Merl was conscious of was a shining arc swinging through the green fog. . . .

TWO endless days of anxiety had made Steve Mallory a haggard, distraught figure. The day after Merl's disappearance he had spent in dashing here and there investigating every possible angle that might lead him to her, but by now he realized the futility of running around without any plan in mind.

Tom Noble was doing everything he could to pacify the boy. He published pictures of the missing girl by the dozen, and filled half of the first page with news and descriptions relative to the case. But by nine o'clock the second night after she had vanished, he was becoming desperate himself.

With a feeble attempt at reassurance, he told him, now, "It must be amnesia, Steve. That's all it can be. People don't just vanish like that without any trace. If it was—murder, say, the body would have turned up by now. It's my bet that she's wandering around somewhere wondering where the devil she it."

Steve shook his head wearily. "No, it can't be that, Tom. Merl was in perfect health. Amnesia doesn't often attack as healthy a girl as she was. I—I don't know what to think. I'm past thinking, I guess."

The white-haired editor leaned back

in his swivel chair and shoved his hands in his pockets. The room they were in was small and littered with scraps of paper, for they had left the city room and sought one of the smaller, private rooms where they could have quiet. On the battered desk lay a copy of the evening paper, just off the press an hour before. Noble glanced at it. "At least we know one thing," he volunteered. "That crazy ad doesn't have anything to do with the case. Whoever is running it mailed his money in for another month just this morning. If it was he that had abducted Merl, he'd probably let it slide for a while."

Steve's dark eyes fastened on the paper with sudden interest, as though he were seeing it for the first time. His forehead, already cobwebbed with fine lines from long hours of sleeplessness and distraction, creased more deeply as an idea took hold of him. His fingers shoved through his thick hair. Suddenly he blurted, "My God, Tom! I'd forgotten about that thing. Why—why couldn't it be the answer? Probably he'd keep on using the ad just to throw off suspicion."

"What does he care about suspicion?" Noble countered. "He's got a fool-proof system that even the best investigators at headquarters haven't been able to dent. We've even had a couple of our own boys on it. If I'm any judge, Steve, it's nothing more than a means of communicating some secret message from one party to another. A code, more'n likely."

"But two years!" Steve exclaimed. "It wouldn't take two years to get the message across. No, I'm convinced there's really something back of it. Something I don't even like to think about." He got up and walked thoughtfully to the window. His eyes took in glumly the glittering night picture below him that was New York. Down there people were crowding the streets in a search for amusement. And up here in the *Herald* office misery and anxiety blotted out all thoughts of pleasure and happiness.

Tom Noble's voice came gently to him as he stood there. "Give the idea up, Steve. I've seen so many of these cases, though never so close to home, that I can almost call my shots before the stories are broken. And I'd take an oath on it that that half-baked classified has no more to do with it than an ad for Dr. Whoosit's Little Liver Pills. And besides—there's nothing more you can do to break it than what the police have tried. There's simply no place to start."

Steve sighed. "Yeah, I know," he agreed. "We can't do anything but sit and wait. And keep on printing news that doesn't mean anything. And all the time we're doing it Merl is somewhere suffering or——"

Noble got up heavily as the boy broke off. "Take it easy, Steve," he advised. "Thinking along that line will just make things worse. All we can do is wait and be ready to act the minute any news comes in. But in the meantime, I've got to get some sleep. You stay here, if you like. If anything happens, you'll be right here to know about it." He went to the door and took his hat off the hook beside it. In a moment the door closed behind him.

Hardly had Steve got settled in the chair after Noble left, when the shrill warning note of the telephone shattered the stillness. He jumped as his trigger-like nerves were jarred. So startled was he that the phone rang a second time before he could pick up the receiver. Frowning at the unexpected call, for calls were never taken in the ante-rooms unless the operator relayed them there, he picked up the desk set and said, "Yeah?"

"Steve!" a voice said excitedly. "Is that you, Steve?"

In a flash Steve Mallory was on the edge of the chair, gripping the receiver with a hand that trembled. The voice was that of Merl Blair!

CHAPTER IV

The Beautiful Hag

FOR a long moment Steve couldn't speak. He seemed frozen rigid with the unexpectedness of it. Then he cried, "Merl! For Lord's sake what's happened? Where are you, and—why haven't you let me know?"

The voice at the other end sounded weak and uncertain. "I don't know, Steve. I can't remember anything, most of the time, and then all of a sudden I remember being on an operating table, or being picked up on the street."

"But where are you?" Mallory pleaded anxiously.

"I don't know that, even. It looks like some sort of sanitarium, or something. But—Steve, there's something wrong with me! Some horrible thing has happened to me!"

The strength seemed to flow out of Steve's body, then. All the fears he had entertained for the last two days seemed justified. Before he could speak, the girl went on dazedly,

"My face looks just the same in the mirror, but—but my body is like an old woman's! It's wrinkled, and stooped, and pouchy. . . . . Oh, Steve, you've got to come and get me!"

Steve's knuckles whitened on the receiver. "What number is written on your telephone?" he asked tensely.

There was a pause while the girl looked it up. The boy's whole body was trembling as he waited, for that number would mean that he had found the way to her. He held his breath, anxious to catch her words. Then, after a moment, a puzzled look came into his eyes. "Merl!" he said quickly. "Can't you find it?"

"Whom did you want, young man?" a different voice cut in. "There is no one by that name at this address. This is the Van Gogh residence."

Mallory was stunned. The voice sounded like Merl's, and yet it was different. It sounded rather husky, and more than a little imperious. "Merl—what's happened?" he cried.

"I have told you that no one by the name of 'Merl' resides here," the receiver crackled. "Apparently you have the wrong number." There was a sharp click—and the line was dead.

Disbelief held Steve in a cold grip for a moment. Then he rattled the receiver up and down and shouted, "Operator! Trace that call. This is Steve Mallory of the *Evening Herald*. I was speaking to Merl Blair and was cut off."

The operator responded quickly. Although strict rules prohibited the tracing of calls for anyone but a police officer, the names of Steve Mallory and Merl Blair were as good as a badge number at this moment, for every man and woman in New York knew of the girl's disappearance.

Soon her voice came back to him: "The call was from Parkway 2384, at Dr. Eric Sturvison's Rest Home on Long Island, near Bridgehampton."

IT TOOK Steve Mallory just five minutes to leave the office, find his car, get a patrolman from a street corner, and head for Long Island. The car flashed through traffic dangerously, cutting through holes scarcely large enough for motorcycles, skidding around corners, skipping stop signals. Patrolman Murphy sat on the edge of his seat,

his big hands gripping the upholstery, his eyes bugging out at the narrow escapes.

When they had reached the comparatively open stretches of Long Island, he relaxed a little. But not for an instant did Steve let up. His body was tense and keyed-up, his face chiseled into sharp lines of determination.

Murphy got his breath long enough to ask a few questions. All he had known when Steve picked him up was that he was Steve Mallory of the *Herald,* and that he was very much in the news right now, as the fiance of the missing girl. Now he queried him about his theory regarding the girl's disappearance.

Steve told him curtly what he feared. He saw a strange look come into Murphy's face as he asked, "You mean this bird's been—sort of swapping heads around?"

Mallory nodded, said, "I'm not crazy, if that's what you're thinking. Sturvison's just the man to try something like this. Probably you've forgotten, but just five years ago the medical board took away his license, for trying to do things that left rather a bad taste in their ethical mouths. Besides that, he was mixed up with the disappearance of a young man who never showed up again. Krishner, I think his name was. They suspected him of experimenting on the boy, but nothing ever came of it."

"Gosh!" Murphy commented, staring at him. His first fear that the reporter was crazy had been swallowed up in another fear—the dread of the unknown. The things Steve had hinted at were sufficient to give him an icy chill in his stomach.

STURVISON'S Rest Home was in an isolated district of low, rocky knolls and scattered clumps of trees, dipped in black shadows now beneath the moonless sky. Something in the very homeliness of the lighted windows of the gaunt, gray stone structure whispered danger. Steve tooled the car swiftly up the long, winding drive through lines of rustling trees, the headlights casting long fingers of light over the rough ground. Against the black sky the gray building loomed blockily, spires of an earlier architecture thrusting up sharply.

The gravel crunched loudly beneath the tires as Mallory ground to a stop. In a flash he had sprung out and was rounding the car. For just a fraction of a second he paused to glance up at the sanitarium before he had passed out of the beam of the headlights. His body stiffened at the shadow that came and went on the curtain of an upstairs window. The figure was the stooped, disheveled one of an aged woman.

In the next moment he had dashed up the steps behind Murphy and was ringing the doorbell furiously. Presently there came the sound of shuffling footfalls, and then a little window in the door was opened. A craggy, stupid face showed in the aperature. Murphy's flashlight stabbed through the square entrance, spilling a dazzling beam in the man's face.

"What you want?" the man asked slowly.

"We want in, brother—and quick!" Murphy growled.

The pale eyes showed fear as they shifted from one man to the other, trying to make out their faces through the dazzling light. Suddenly he raised his hand to slam the window shut.

But Murphy was ready for the move. The blue barrel of a Police Positive shoved through the window squarely in the man's face. "Now open up," he snapped, "before this thing goes off."

After a second there was the grating of a lock, and the door inched inward.

Steve shoved through brusquely. His eyes swept the interior of the place, noting the ancient oak paneling, the high ceiling, the antiquated furniture. But above the room somewhere there was the humming of powerful electric motors, hinting at things that were modern—and dangerous.

"Where is she?" Mallory asked tensely, seizing the man by the shirt front.

"I show you," the gigantic assistant replied after a pause, looking down at the reporter, whom he could have felled with a single blow. He turned and shuffled off to a flight of stairs that led off to the right.

Side by side, Mallory and the officer followed him. Not for a second did the revolver waver from its line on the man's back. At the top of the stairs they were led down a short hall to the left. The giant stopped before a door and knocked.

A man's voice came through the door almost immediately. "Who was it, Krishner?"

Mallory growled, before the man could enter, "Tell him it was somebody that was lost."

Krishner echoed stupidly, "Somebody was lost. Gone now."

"Good!" the man's voice came back. "I was—a little afraid, for a minute." The door swung open to reveal a large, broad-shouldered man in a white surgeon's smock. He was holding a small metal disk in his hand, toying nervously with it. Abruptly, an oath slipped through his lips as he saw the uniformed figure of Murphy. "You damned fool, Krishner!" he gasped. "You said——"

His words were cut off in his throat as Steve Mallory's fist smashed into his face. The big reporter came through the door close behind him as he fell to the floor. He reached down and scooped him up by the collar. "Where is she, you butcher?" he choked. "What have you done to her?"

Dr. Sturvison's green eyes shuttled back and forth from officer to reporter, trying to discern just how much they knew. His face became pale, except where Steve's knuckles had brought a red bruise out on his cheek-bone. Suddenly he whirled at the sound of a step at his left. From the little supply alcove across the laboratory stepped an old woman—but on her shoulders was the head of a lovely young girl!

IN a flash, Steve Mallory had sprung to her side, and was gripping her hands. He recoiled as the cold, wrinkled flesh came in contact with his palms. Meri stiffened and took a step backwards. "I don't believe I know you, Mr.——?" Her dark blue eyes searched his face.

"Meri!" Steve gasped. "What's happened to you? Don't you remember me?"

There was no trace of recognition in her face.

Suddenly the boy turned and walked back to the trio standing by the door. "Give me the gun, Murphy," he breathed. "I'm going to blast this butcher where he belongs. I'm going to send him straight to hell, where he can begin paying for the things he's done." He was trembling and white, and his voice shook.

"If you weren't so blind," Sturvison said quietly, "you might realize what you will do by killing me." Only the twitching of his right eye denoted the struggle for mastery that was taking place within him.

Mallory stopped with his hand extended for the revolver. A taut silence built up between them. Krishner still stood quietly watching the proceedings. Murphy's face was rock-hard and emotionless. Sturvison eyed the young re-

porter steadily.

Again he spoke. "You would like to see your financée returned to normal, wouldn't you? Very well, it can be done. By me—and by no one else!"

Steve blinked. His face, dark with fury, showed only bewilderment for a moment. Then, like ice breaking up in a spring stream, the meaning of Sturvison's words came to him. New hope sprang up in him with a surge that made him tremble. By Sturvison's own admission, the girl could have her own lovely body restored to her! Scarcely able to control his emotion, he snapped, "Then do it, for Lord's sake! And if you're trying some kind of trick on us, we'll butcher you worse than any of your patients ever were!"

Sturvison smiled bleakly as he turned. "There is no need for threats," he told him. "However, not even threats will make me perform the operation without your promise on one thing. I must be released as soon as the operation is finished!"

Steve hesitated for just a second. Then he nodded, "All right. But whether you get caught later or not doesn't enter into it."

"I'm not worrying about that," the scientist smiled. He turned and strode across the floor towards the big metal door across from them. He shot an order at Krishner, and the giant shambled into the sub-floor operating room to prepare the instruments.

While they waited, the two men looked the place over incredulously. The gruesome scene in the alcove filled with bowls and bell-jars made both of them a little shaky. Steve avoided looking at the girl who was wandering aimlessly about. It was more than he could stand to see the ghastly thing that had been done.

Sturvison emerged from the small room in a moment, carrying a tray on which was the sheet-draped body of a woman. Mallory's heart struck one wild beat at the sight. The scientist hurried into the operating chamber and laid the body on one of the tables. He pulled the sheet down to expose the head of a hag! Steve was horrified—until he recalled that the old woman's head was fixed to the torso of a young girl.

Krishner, at Sturvison's command, moved away to bring the Van Gogh woman into the room. While he was occupied with this duty, the scientist laid out masks, instruments, and other paraphernalia. Steve was surprised to see no antiseptics or any sign of curative agents. "Isn't there an awful chance of infection?" he asked hurriedly. "An operation like that must take days to heal."

Sturvison shook his head. "The antisepsis I use is a gas," he explained. "And as far as healing is concerned—it takes place in a matter of minutes. The stupid plan of dressing a wound and letting nature take its course is what has made surgery such a dangerous necessity, but I have found a way around it. Using as a basis the fact that radium has remarkable curative powers, I developed my own curative. Placed about the wound in the form of tape, it hastens coagulation and the formation of serum. These two factors, of course, are the primary considerations in healing. Thus, with the usual three days exudation of serum taking place in ten seconds, the rest of the process is finished very quickly."

A DISTURBING thought filtered into Steve's mind. Why wouldn't Merl's mind still be almost blank after the operation? Could the mere transferring of a head from one body to the other cause the mind to be altered? Almost afraid of the answer he might

receive, he asked tensely, "But how will her mind ever become normal again? Isn't she under some hallucination?"

The scientist looked up from his lashing the bodies to the tables. He shot a glance at the lumbering form of Krishner. "You will have Krishner to thank for her being entirely normal when the operation is finished," he responded. "He is hardly the finished workman my work requires of assistants. Krishner, to be quite frank, is one of my earlier failures. He is an excellent imitator, ordinarily, but on this occasion he slipped. Unless the subject's brain is completely deadened at the time of the transfer, the mind remains unaltered. However, if the anaesthetic—radio-chloride, in this instance — is imperfectly administered, the mind retains all its former memories. This is where Krishner failed. He administered a dilute solution of the anaesthetic. The girl was almost normal when she came out of it. The little metal disk I was holding when you came in was part of my plan to remedy that situation. Only hypnotism is effective after the operation. My attempts so far have been only partially successful."

He broke off now and handed the assistant a mask. In silence they donned them. Anaesthetics were administered, the dosage given to the girl being a very slight one. Steve found himself becoming more tense every second, frightened by a hundred fears. Was Sturvison really telling them the truth? Or was this a plan of his to trick them? Another consideration galled him. The price of Merl's safety was turning this unscruplous surgeon loose on the world again, to subject other young girls to the same brutal treatment. The boy's heart and mind waged a bitter fight while he waited for the men in the room below to commence the work.

At last the thick glass shield was slipped into place. Immediately, the hissing of escaping gas came to the ears of the watchers. Green billows of semi-transparent vapor swept through the small room, making the figures below indistinct, moving shapes.

Murphy's breathing became audible to Steve, as it rasped through set teeth. His own mouth was dry as cotton, his eyes wide in fearful anticipation. Alone in the big room, they crouched at the edge of the pit and stared down at a scene only the two men below them had ever witnessed before.

Then, over the hissing of the gas, a sharp order reached their ears: *"Now!"*

CHAPTER V

Back from Death

STEVE flinched, looked away in sudden horror. He found he could not watch what might result in a ghastly surgical nightmare. The very thought of a knife slicing cruelly through Merl's neck caused him to shudder.

Through the thick glass came the sound of a sharp click, as of a spring being released. There was the brief hum of a motor—and then silence. The reporter and the cop stood in tense silence, waiting—for what? Life, and sanity, for a young girl, who meant more to Steve than life itself? Or a horrible death, or still worse—the living death of insanity? A few seconds' wait would tell them.

Soon the green fog began to thin. The cloud of vapor became a thinning veil between watchers and operating tables. Then, as powerful fans drew the last of the antiseptic gas from the chamber, the scene was revealed!

A glad cry escaped Steve's lips. Merl Blair lay on the table exactly as though

she were sleeping, her face relaxed in sleep that was not the endless sleep she had so nearly escaped. Her face was flushed with blood pumping through her cheeks, her lips parted to expose white teeth. Beneath the coverings over her body, her breasts rose and fell regularly. The effects of artificially induced suspended animation had worn off completely.

Only a thin red line on the girl's throat denoted the operation that had taken place. And even as they watched, Sturvison bound a wide strip of yellow tape about it.

On the other table lay the wrinkled body of an old woman. Her face was pouchy and toothless, the eyes closed. The wealthy old crone had had the beauty she sought for two days, and now, by a justice that had caught up with her, she was again the hag that long years had made her.

The scientist and his helper took off the gas masks. Krishner slid the glass shield back and went up the stairs. Sturvison paused, before ascending, to take some papers from a shelf in the wall. Then he came up from the operating room to the two men who waited.

Murphy still stood looking in amazement down at the girl. Steve looked white and shaky, too, as though he had come through a terrific ordeal. Sturvison stood for a moment smiling at them, contemptuously. His right eye twitched nervously.

In the next moment, without any warning, he sprang forward. His left hand smashed into the side of Krishner's head as he dived at Murphy. The giant uttered a single, piercing shriek as he toppled over the edge of the pit. Steve's startled eyes caught a glimpse of him as he struck the floor with a thud.

An oath crowded the cop's lips. He fell back as the surprise rush carried him off his feet and dumped him on the floor. The gun skittered off across the cement.

In a flash Sturvison had swept it up and swung it on the two men. "You are very trusting," he taunted. "If you thought I trusted you as much as you did me, you were mistaken. I knew I would have no chance of leaving here alone. Nor will you leave, to expose me and end my work!"

A wave of anger shook Mallory. He took one step towards the scientist and clenched his fists in impotent rage. "You won't get far!" he raged. "They'll trap you somehow. They can trace that phone call and find you."

"But when they get here," Sturvison snarled, "there will be no bodies, nor any other traces to convict me. After the investigation, I will simply move somewhere else and continue my work." His greenish eyes mocked the boy's anger.

Murphy was muttering in self-condemnation and bitter regrets. "I mighta known a half-baked scientist like you would try somethin' funny," he ground out savagely. "If I could get hold o' that gun for one second——"

THE big cop broke off angrily. But it was not entirely anger that caused the torrent of words to dry up. For at that moment both he and Steve Mallory noticed something crawling up from the operating room. Their eyes widened at the sight of the bloody, hulking figure of Krishner. A mad light gleamed in his eyes, and his hands clenched and unclenched.

Sturvison stopped short, looked at the two men. His shrewd brain read danger in their faces. Some warning sound whirled him about. In a flash he saw his position. "Krishner!" he shouted. "Go back in the pit! Go back, or I'll shoot you!"

The giant's face twisted in sullen fury as he wiped a big paw across his bloody mouth. He mumbled something unintelligible, and came on. His long arms hung limply, but the blocky shoulders testified to their gorilla-like power.

"Go back!" the scientist warned again. "One step more and I'll kill you!"

Krishner's lips formed a harsh, mocking laugh. Without a pause, he shambled on.

The gun in Sturvison's hand crashed once. Krishner jerked as the bullet smashed into his shoulder. A ragged hole appeared in the white smock, and red began to widen slowly about it. But his shambling pace was not stopped. He continued on, his arms raised now to seize the scientist.

Sturvison's face blanched as he squeezed the trigger twice. The gun leaped in his hand as lead sped into Krishner's stomach. A cry of agony came from the assistant but he showed no other effect of the bullets' power. Suddenly he broke into an awkward run and charged at him. Sturvison seemed to shrink down as he gripped the gun and emptied it, in three final blasts of gun-fire, into the body of the giant.

He shrieked as Krishner grabbed him in a vicious hug. The gun beat futilely against the helper's head, bringing a torrent of blood down the man's face but only serving to enrage him still further.

Krishner's big hands sought his throat. With an animal growl, he held the creator of his ill-formed being out at arm's length and shook him as a cat shakes a mouse. The scientist dangled loosely. His face went blue from the vise-like grip that was choking the life from him, and his eyes bugged out horribly. And still the giant continued to squeeze harder and harder. His fingers dug into the soft throat until they had all but disappeared in folds of flesh.

Suddenly the big hands relaxed. Krishner twisted about to look at the two men who stood stock-still watching the drama. After a moment he slid to the floor. Sturvison's body fell across him, his neck broken. His own monster, that he had created to enslave other helpless men and women, had caused his downfall.

Steve and Murphy stared for a long five seconds at the huddled shapes on the floor before they moved. Then the cop muttered, "What a cop that guy woulda made! A slug didn't faze him any more'n a pea-shooter would."

But Steve was staring at the papers clutched in his right hand, which he had taken from the shelf in the pit. "The secret of his process," he murmured. "He was probably going to destroy them and deprive humanity of a blessing that might never have been discovered again. His own greed made a horror out of the secret that could have saved countless lives if he had given it to science. Krishner will never know, poor, stupid monster that he was, what he did for others as pitiful as he."

For a moment longer he stared at them, and then he shook off the spell and went hurriedly down the steps into the operating room. Merl was looking about dazedly when he bent over her. Her eyes fastened on him in terror—and then they softened and a film of tears came over them.

"Steve!" she whispered, in the voice he had grown to love. "What—what happened, Steve? I remember a man talking to me on the street, and then—then it all seems a blank."

Relief made Steve Mallory's knees shaky as he heard the girl's voice. His eyes were on the strip of tape about her throat. Beneath it, he knew, the miracle

was taking place that had given her back to him. After a moment he said, "Let's just say that nothing has happened, dear. All that matters now is that you're all right—and that tomorrow night at eight we're going to take up right where we left off the other day!"

THE END

PROTECTION FOR WAR SUPPLIES

UNTIL very recently, it was the accepted method when shipping tools and equipment of any kind abroad to coat them with grease or oil in order to protect them from rust. Then when the machinery and tools reached their destination, it was necessary to remove this protective coating before they were assembled. This was all right in time of peace when minutes were not so precious and man power could be used to clean the parts, but in war time the picture is different. Neither the time nor the manpower is available for this job and so science set about to provide a remedy.

Thanks to the ingenuity of the paper industry the solution to the problem is at hand. They have developed a paper wrapping for the various parts that is completely moisture-proof. The parts are wrapped in the paper without any protective coating and are shipped in this way. One additional precaution is taken, however. Inside each package a vial of calcium chloride is placed to absorb any moisture that may be formed at the time of packaging or during shipment due to the condensation of the air inside the package.

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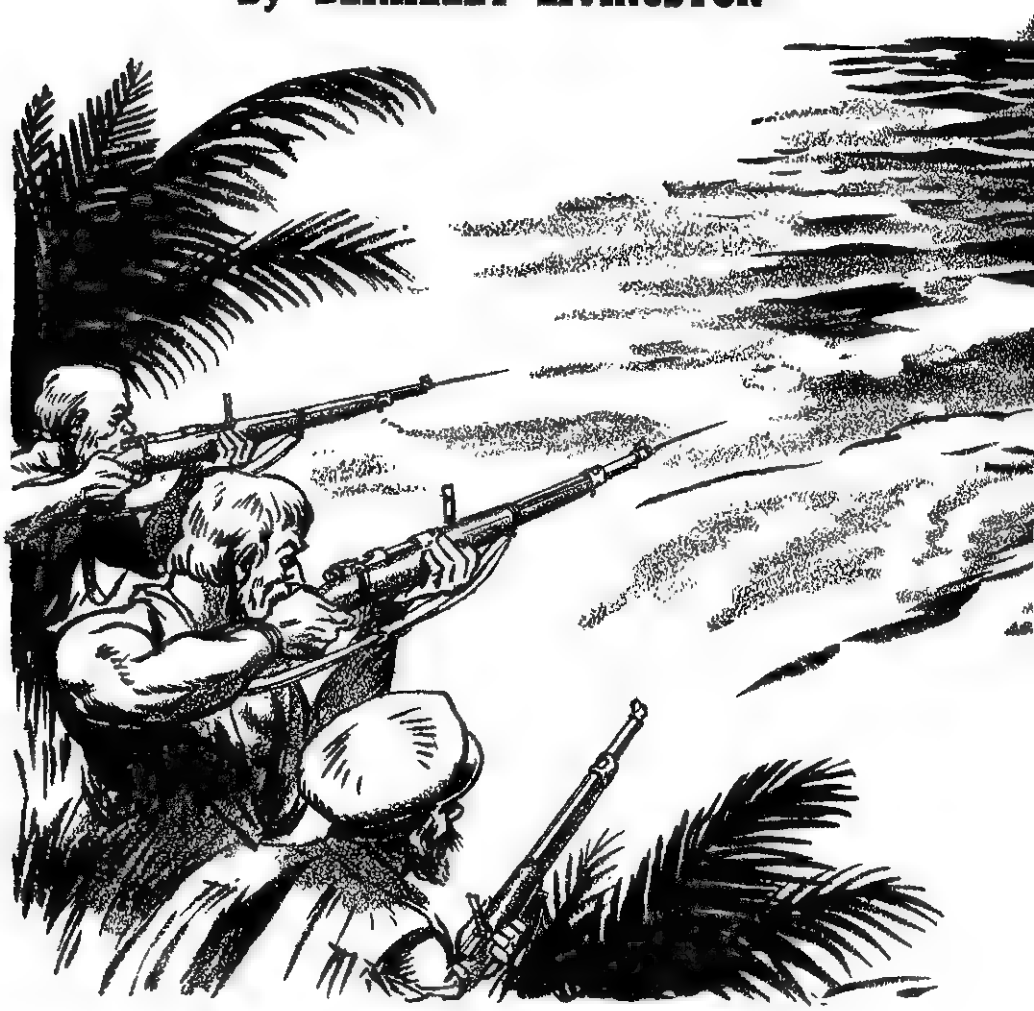
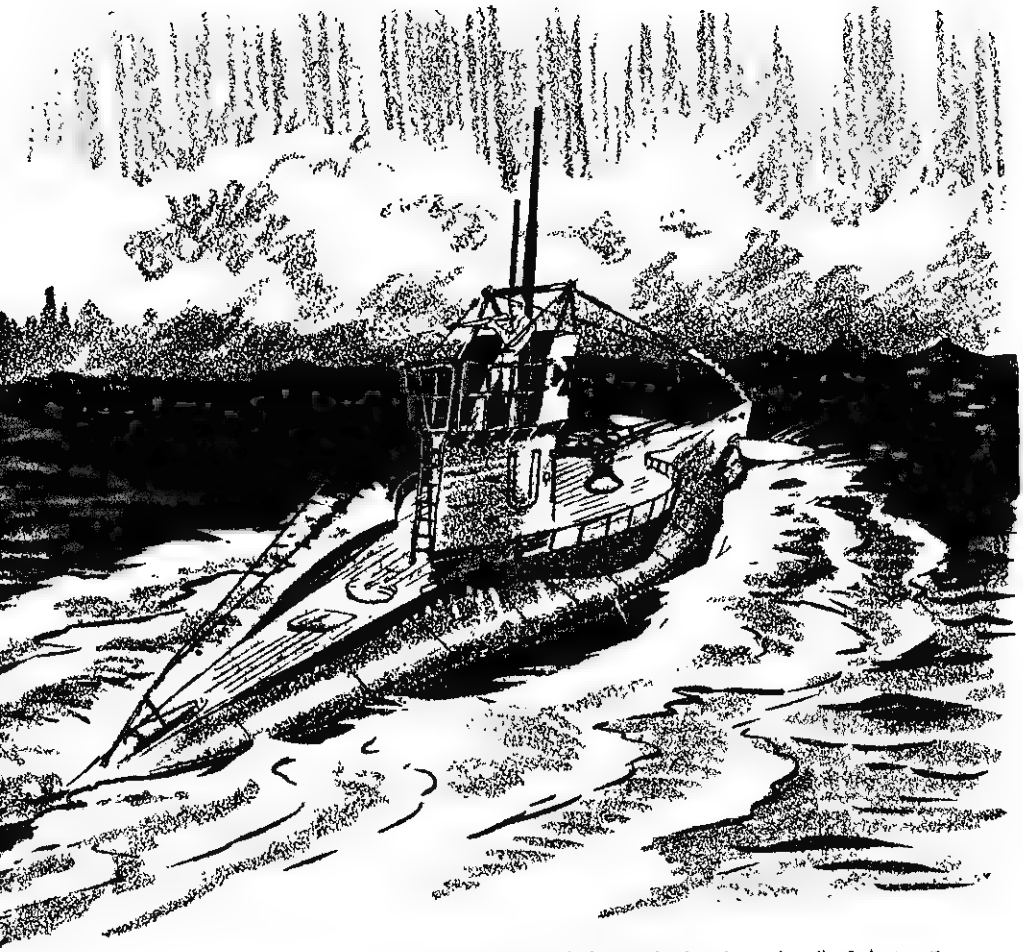
ISLAND OF ETERNAL STORM

By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON



A weird red cloud hung on the horizon—beyond it was an island as alien as infinity!



The submarine headed straight for the red wall of destruction

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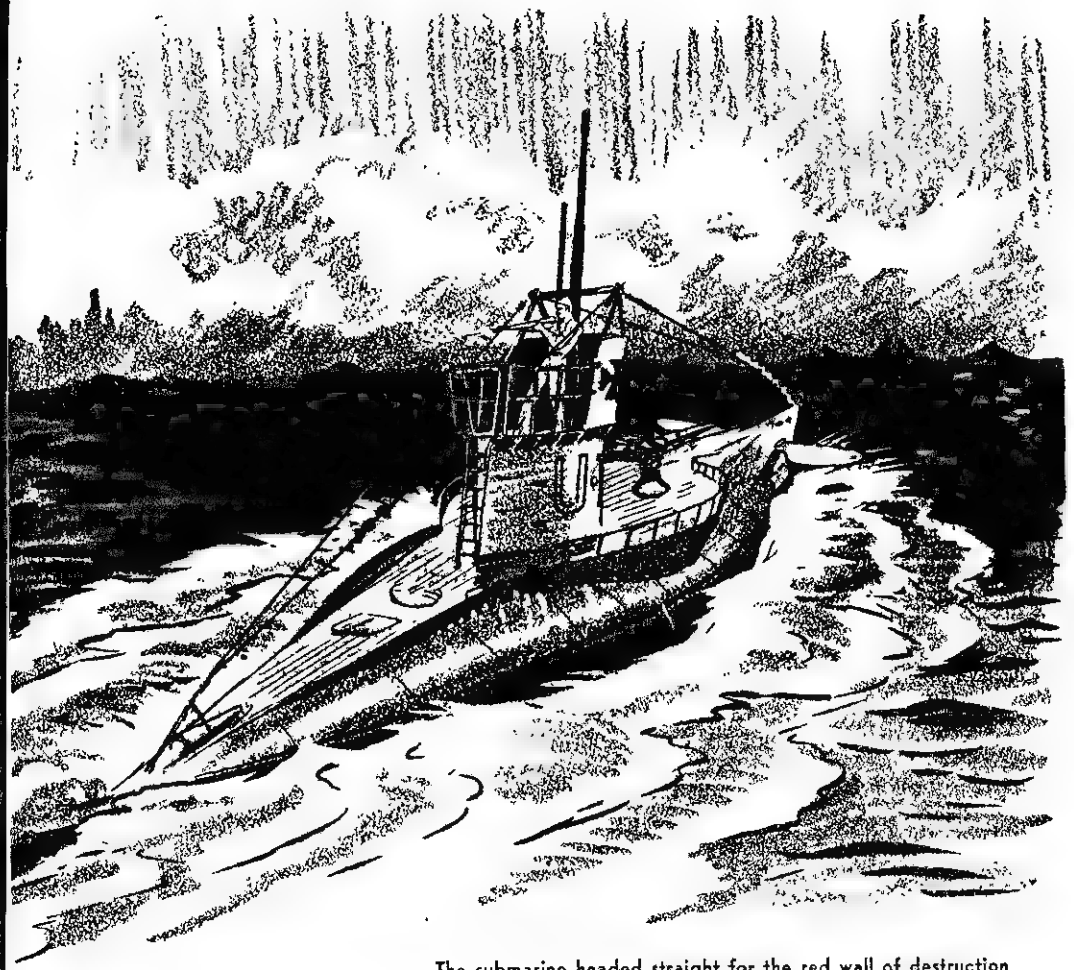

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The captain of the *Sao Paulo* had introduced them during their first dinner, as Mr. Carl Bremner of New York City and Miss Virginia Darnell of the same

address. Bremner's pale blue eyes had flicked their gaze over Latimer in a lightning appraisal, before he had acknowledged the introduction with a cold, curt, "a pleasure, Professor Latimer."

Virginia Darnell's low voice, but pleasant, "I am happy to meet you, Professor Latimer," sent a strange feeling through him.

And that was all. For three days and nights the *Sao Paulo* plowed through the South Pacific. At night the freighter's ports were closed so that no light would show its presence to an enemy submarine.

Not once during those days and nights had Latimer been able to break through the wall of mystery which surrounded the strange pair.

Walking around the freighter's deck was the only exercise to be had. Often Latimer had come across the girl leaning over a rail, an expression of sadness etched on her face and in her eyes. But at his approach she would walk away or deliberately turn her back to him.

Of one thing, however, Latimer was sure. That she was very much afraid of Bremner. It was evident in her eyes, her voice and in the very way she stood when she talked to him. As though she were at bay.

On this, the fourth, night Latimer had come into the lounge for a cool drink before taking his last stroll around the deck. A few minutes later Virginia Darnell and Bremner had come in deep in discussion. Virginia had been objecting to something Bremner wanted.

Latimer watched. Suddenly Bremner lost his temper over something the girl said.

His voice, loud and harsh, carried clearly to Latimer's ears, as he said, "I want to hear no more of this! I have told you what to do when we arrive and I expect you to do it!"

Latimer didn't remember getting out of his chair. He was conscious only of the intense blue of the girl's startled eyes as he stood before the couple on the sofa.

"Yes?" asked Bremner. The single word was cold and impersonal.

"Look, Miss Darnell," Latimer began, paying no attention to Bremner, "you don't *have* to do anything! I don't know what kind of a bill of goods he's trying to sell you, or what he—"

Bremner cut in coldly. "Perhaps it would be best if you minded your own business, Professor Latimer."

"This *has* become my business."

A sneer twisted the deeply lined face of Carl Bremner.

"So our Miss Darnell has acquired a Sir Galahad!"

Latimer found himself suddenly quivering with anger. He wanted more than anything else to send his fist crashing against that sneering face.

Bremner said, "Come my dear, perhaps we will find more privacy on the deck." The girl bowed her head in a humble gesture and arose to leave.

Latimer looked in helpless frustration at the door as it closed behind them. Turning on his heel he made his way toward the after-deck, where the superstructure of the bridge would cut the headwind. He remained there for a half hour, letting the night air cool his anger.

A SINGLE sailor stood watch on the fantail. Latimer could see his youthful figure silhouetted in the brilliant rays of a full tropic moon. Of the two he had come to find, he could see nothing. But as he reached the short ladder which led up to the after-deck, he heard Bremner's domineering voice say, "You fool, have you forgotten

about your brother? Remember: if you do not do as I say, he shall pay for your disobedience; pay with his life!"

"No Carl, no! I'll do anything you ask! Anything!" she pleaded. "Only please see that no harm comes to him."

Latimer's feet barely touched the rungs as he flew up the ladder. Virginia and Bremner were facing each other in the shelter of one of the two lifeboats on the deck.

Bremner was twisting one of her wrists. "Then we understand each other, my dear. And we shall have no more of this talk about not wanting to do things."

She cried out in agony, "Don't Carl, you're hurting me! Please."

Latimer reached Bremner in three quick strides. His left hand twisted him about while his right came up in a short powerful punch which ended on Bremner's mouth. The blow did not knock him down, but it did send him reeling back against the rail. Latimer did not wait for him to recover. He leaped in and sent two more blows crashing against the dazed man's face. Bremner slid off the rail and fell on the deck. But Latimer was not quite through. He reached down and lifted him erect, back against the rail. Words thick with rage, came through Latimer's lips. "I'm going to beat you to a pulp, right now, with my bare hands."

Through the blinding fog of his rage he could feel Virginia's hands tugging at him. Her voice, brittle with panic, made him release the half-conscious Bremner. "Please, stop it! You'll kill him and that's no good for either of us. Please stop."

Latimer turned to the girl tugging at his arms, opened his mouth to speak.

"Tor-pe-do!"

The hoarse voice of the sailor on watch came like an alarm siren.

They could not see the feathery silvered wake as the torpedo streaked toward the slow-moving ship. They only heard it strike!

A gigantic roar, followed by a searing sheet of orange flame marked the end of the torpedo's trail. The *Sao Paulo* shuddered through its entire frame. Its superstructure careened drunkenly for a minute, then, with a terrifying swiftness the whole foredeck, bridge and all, broke away from the rest of the vessel and sank beneath the boiling waters.

The terrific concussion of the explosion sent the four who were on the afterdeck flying off their feet. Somehow, Latimer got hold of the girl, cushioned her fall with his body.

QUICKLY Latimer pulled her erect. The sailor had scrambled to one of the lifeboats. He was now pulling himself upright. Bremner too, was on his feet, swaying from side to side.

Latimer leaped forward to the sailor who was calling. "Quick, help me get this lifeboat down!"

Latimer and Bremner helped the sailor make loose the ropes which bound the boat to the davits and then three men and the girl scrambled aboard. They hit the water. No other survivors were visible. They rowed a short distance away from the distintegrating freighter. Then that part which had remained afloat lurched once and sank also. They barely escaped from the suction its sinking created.

Latimer took instant command of the lifeboat.

"You there," he said to the youthful and white-faced sailor in the oil-stained work clothes. "What's your name?"

"Benjy Shore, sir," the young fellow answered, "engine room helper, first class. I was transferred to a hitch at lookout."

Latimer found time to smile at the sailor's unsolicited remark on his qual-

ifications. He also realized that here was someone he could depend on.

"All right, son," Latimer continued, "you want to get out of this, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Benjy.

"Then follow my orders to the letter. And keep remembering, I'm taking the place of the captain."

The boy nodded his head in agreement with Latimer.

"Your first orders are to see how we stand on food and water. Investigate the boat's locker for sails and compass. Perhaps you may find some maps. Now hop to it."

Obedience had left its mark on Benjy and Latimer had used the right tone in giving his orders. The boy instantly went about fulfilling them.

Virginia shared Latimer's seat. Except for a last look at the spot where the ship had gone down, she sat leaning against his shoulder, her eyes tightly closed.

It was Bremner who gave Latimer a surprise. Silently and efficiently he pulled on the oars. Nor did he question Latimer's taking charge of their tiny vessel.

Benjy Shore crawled out from under the last seat in the stern. He rolled a small cask before him while in one hand he carried a small square box. Latimer lifted the small cask and shook it.

"We'll have enough water," he announced. "Now to see what's in this box." The contents proved to be ship's biscuits.

"Food and drink. What else did you find, Benjy?" he asked.

"That's all, sir. I felt all around but I couldn't find anything else."

Latimer was silent for a while, lost in thought. He knew the nearest land was at least five hundred miles distant. Although the *Sao Paulo* had been on a well traveled route, the possibility was against the tiny lifeboat being seen.

At last he broke his silence by speaking to Bremner, "Any ideas or suggestions, Bremner?"

But the silent man at the oars held his thoughts to himself.

"Very well then. Here's what we'll do. Row at night. Rest during the day. I'll allot all food and drink. It looks pretty bad right now," he said in conclusion, "but the chances are that we'll be picked up. So let's make the best of it."

Now that the terror of the torpedoing was over for Benjy, he proved to be a cheerful sort.

"You're right, sir. I heard the engineer say only this morning that the route we travel was so busy they need a traffic cop sometimes."

Virginia smiled at his cheerful sally.

THE rest of the night passed in silence broken only by the creak of the oars in the oarlocks, as the three men rowed steadily.

It was on the fourth day after the sinking that Bremner Benjy called Latimer's attention to the strange looking cloud.

Latimer looked out to where Benjy was excitedly pointing. He could see it hanging low on the horizon; the strangest looking cloud he had ever seen. Of a peculiar reddish cast, it looked like a curtain of mist shot through with purplish lights.

"I've never seen anything like it before," he said worriedly. "I only hope it's not a storm. We've been lucky so far."

But he noticed an even stranger thing. A current was developing in the water. And the boats prow had slowly pivoted in the direction of the cloud. Soon they all noticed the definite acceleration of speed.

Latimer's eyes grew wide in concern.

"That current is pulling us toward that cloud area," he said.

The boat was now leaping forward, as though eager to get to its goal. Soon they were so close they could make out that it was not a cloud at all. It was a curtain of *red dust* which hung suspended to the very water's edge. And stranger still, the dust gave off a not unpleasant odor as they moved within the curtain.

Now the boat lost some of its speed, but the prow was still pointed in a definite direction. They all noticed that the water, reddish colored as the dust above it, was calm, without even the smallest of a wave to disturb its surface. The boat went on for several miles and as suddenly as it had entered the curtain, it emerged into an area of turbulence such as they had never seen. It was a maelstrom of sound and fury. Mountainous waves flung themselves in thunderous assault against a barrier of saw-toothed rocks. A demoniac wind had arisen and howled and tore about their ears.

Benjy took one look at the scene of horror, then with a howl of terror threw himself face downward in the boat. He pressed his hands over his ears trying to shut out the frightening noises of the elements. Bremner cowered down in his seat, his eyes frantically searching for an escape.

Strangest enough, the girl, who should have been the most frightened of the four, showed the least fear. Latimer saw the paleness of her face, but felt a thrill of admiration as he noticed the tight set of her jaw.

Now the boat entered the maelstrom. The water lashed and tore at it. The mad wind howled down on its occupants, as though to tear them from their seats. Nearer and nearer to the murderous rocks it came. A gigantic wave, spitting white froth in its madness, lifted the boat and sent it crashing down against the reef.

Latimer saw Bremner flung high in the air, screaming and turning as he fell. A giant hand seemed to reach down and pluck Virginia from his grasp. Unendurable agony came as needle sharp rocks tore at his flesh. He heard and felt the bones of his arms and legs snap. His last conscious remembrance was of the heavy prow of the lifeboat crushing down on the golden head of Virginia, who was pinned against a rock.

HUGH LATIMER opened heavy-lidded eyes. Dull pain beat at his brain and slowly subsided. He became aware of the sound of water swishing against a shore. A breeze, sweetly cloying with some strange odor, ruffled his dark hair.

His eyes, beginning to focus at last, took in the unsullied azure blue of the sky. The pale green color of fern fronds set against the darker, lusher greens of jungle growth caught his attention. He turned his head to see better. Then memory, like a stab of pain, returned to Hugh Latimer.

Memory: of that horror scene; of lashing waters; of hungry rocks, like shark's teeth, waiting for their prey; and of Virginia being dashed to her death.

Horrified, he sat erect and felt no pain in doing so. Something clicked in his mind. His own body being gashed and torn by the rocks; yet he felt no pain. He fell to examining his hands. What he saw was unbelievable. The muscles, tendons and bones beneath their sheath of outer skin were writhing and twisting back into their normal places. Yet he felt no pain. It was as though some cosmic anaesthesia held him in its grip; permitting him to *see* the miracle being performed; *withholding* the pain. The flesh, which had been

torn and lacerated, was healing and growing together before his very eyes. He looked down at his right leg. It had been twisted around in an impossible manner. It, too, like his hands, was assuming its natural position.

Before him lay a placid stretch of water, several hundred feet wide. Beyond, acting as a sort of breakwater, was the reef. He could see the spray from the churning waves breaking over it. Past the reef was the immense curtain of red dust.

"Mr. Latimer, Mr. Latimer!"

Latimer jerked his head around in a startled gesture. Benjy Shore was coming toward him on a slow wavering run.

Latimer scrambled erect and ran forward to meet him.

"Gee, Mr. Latimer, am I glad to see you!" Benjy gasped.

"And I can say the same for you," Latimer replied, "but where are—?"

He didn't complete the question. The look of misery which had spread over the boy's face was answer enough.

"I don't know, sir," Benjy said haltingly. "I guess I was knocked out or something. When I came to, I was laying back there on the beach and the funniest thing was going on. It was like I was being put together. But I couldn't feel anything."

"Yes, I know," Latimer interrupted. "The same thing happened to me. But are you sure you didn't see Miss Darnell or Bremner?"

"No, sir," Benjy answered. "Neither hide nor hair of either one."

It was with the greatest effort that Latimer was able to control himself. He had grown to like the girl the first time he had seen her. Those nights in the lifeboat had been a revelation to him. She had brought water to each of the men at the oars. It was then that she had told him of the association of Bremner and herself.

He could still hear her voice saying: "I was acting in a show in New York. One night I came home and found Bremner waiting for me. He told me who he was—a Gestapo agent—and what he wanted of me. He wanted me to come to Dakar with him, where I would be introduced to several French officials. I refused! He laughed and told me that I would do it or else my brother would die. And he showed me a clipping from a newspaper. My brother, a flier with the R. A. F. had been shot down in Germany. They found my picture on him when they picked him up. And Bremner had traced me to New York. He told me that my brother would die, if I didn't do their bidding. But before they killed him, Brenner told me of the torture he would go through. It was too much for me. I gave in to his demands."

Latimer would never forget the half-defined terror in her voice as she told her tale.

"WELL, Benjy," he said at last, "it looks like the two of us will have to see what's what around here."

"Yah! But say, Mr. Latimer," Benjy questioned, "tell me something? How come we don't hear the sound of the surf breaking on that reef? We're only a couple of hundred feet off?"

That was one of the things bothering Latimer also. The almost uncanny silence of his strange place.

"I don't know, Benjy," he replied hesitantly, "But I'm sure there's an explanation. Right now though, we'd better get to looking for some shelter."

Latimer noticed that his shirt and trousers were dry. So he had been lying on the beach for at least an hour before consciousness had returned. He was thankful for that. Tropic nights could be chilly. And already twilight was falling. A strange, red-colored twilight, the

product of the red curtain of dust.

"Come on Benjy," he said leading the way down the beach, "there's no sense in just standing around like this. We're probably on some island, which should mean friendly natives. At least I've never heard of unfriendly ones in this part of the world."

"Okay Mr. Latimer," the boy said resignedly, "but I sure would like to know how I healed up so fast; and how come—"

The moon had come up and gave them light enough to see by as they made their way along the shore.

They walked on in silence for the better part of several hours. Latimer had fallen into a brown study as they walked along and so had not noticed that Benjy was several hundred feet ahead of him.

He was startled and dismayed to hear Benjy's sudden scream of "Help! Mr. Latimer, quick!" Ahead of him he could see the furiously flailing arms of the boy. He was struggling desperately with two almost naked natives.

Latimer leaped to his rescue—and was neatly tripped, and sent tumbling to the ground. He had not seen the fibre rope which had been carefully stretched across the sand. He only felt the weight of several bodies press him down and hold him as hands bound his wrists together.

Arms pulled him savagely erect again. He saw Benjy still twisting angrily about, in the grasp of the two natives. His hands, like Latimer's, were tied behind his back.

For the first time Latimer had a good look at his captors. What he saw, he didn't like. Not the least bit! There were a half dozen of them. Big strapping bucks, wearing only a lava-lava. Bone handled knives were stuck in the waistband of their lava-lavas. But it was the dull animal look in their faces which sent Latimer's pulses racing with uneasiness. Or perhaps it was their eyes, entirely blank of any emotion, which seemed so unearthly.

Not satisfied with tying their captives' hands, they also tide their legs at the ankles. Two men picked up each of their captives and at a slow dog trot made off toward the jungle.

WHEN they arrived at the first line of jungle giants, Latimer and Benjy were unceremoniously dumped to the ground. Now two of the men climbed what appeared to be a ladder set into the bole of the tree. Within a few seconds a rope came coiling down to the rest waiting below. The rope was secured under Latimer's arms and he was jerked upward finally to be pulled onto a platform set in the crotch of a large branch. The rope was removed from under his arms and let down again. Within a few seconds, Benjy was lying beside him.

The rest of the natives came scrambling up the ladder and when the last appeared, Latimer and Benjy were again lifted to the sweaty backs of their captors. And then to the complete mystification of the two white men, the entire party broke into that slow dog trot again.

"What the hell are they running on?" was Latimer's amazed thought. He twisted his head over as far as it could go and his startled eyes saw that the natives were running on a marvelously woven carpet of vines or small branches. Not only that, but he could tell by the evenness of their strides that this carpet was as level as a concrete sidewalk. And all this was taking place without the aid of any light; for the moon's rays did not penetrate through the upper reaches of the trees.

From up ahead, Benjy's voice floated back to him. "Hey, Professor, what the

heck are they running on? Air!"

He also heard the sound of a slap and then Benjy's fluent cursing of the slapper. Latimer had to grin in spite of the spreading discomfort and pain his jouncing body was beginning to feel.

He grunted out a "Hey, take it easy Bud," as one of his carriers decided to shift his weight in mid-stride—and felt his jaws go slack as an answer came back—in *English*. "Keep your mouth closed, white man!"

His thoughts ran riot. "What sort of place is this, where the natives speak English? And go flitting around like birds in the trees? I got one answer. Maybe I'll get another."

Aloud he asked gaspingly, "Where are you taking us to?"

He waited for several seconds for a reply and receiving none, asked again, "Damn it, where are you taking us to?"

One of the several who were running beside them, hearing Latimer call out again, reached over and cuffed him against the side of his jaw, and said, "You were told to shut up."

Now it was Benjy's turn to laugh at the cursing of Latimer. The rest of the journey was made in a silence broken only by the heavy breathing of the running men.

LATIMER became aware of the lights at the same time the natives did. They began to quicken their pace. Soon they arrived at a break in the trees. Here Latimer and Benjy were put down and again the rope was placed under their arms. They were lowered to the hard packed ground and the bonds around their ankles removed.

Latimer and Benjy were pulled erect—and promptly collapsed. The combination of thongs and uncomfortable positions had almost completely stopped their circulation. But their captors did not see the humor of the situation. They were yanked upright once again and pushed stumblingly forward.

Ahead of them, Latimer saw where the light came from. Three large camp fires shed a bright glow over a clearing toward which they were being driven. A half dozen grass-thatched huts were set in a small semi-circle behind the fires.

Latimer saw three figures step out in front of the largest of the fires. The two larger figures seemed to be holding the smaller between them. He could only see their dark silhouettes against the flames.

As the three came closer, Latimer and Benjy's captors held them upright, so that the approaching figures could see who they were.

For a second Latimer thought that he was going mad. That figure in the middle, stumbling forward with hair streaming down over her face couldn't be Virginia. No! Virginia was dead; back there on the reef. But now they were so close that Latimer was able to see that it was her. And to make certain that Latimer recognized her; Bremner—for Latimer saw now he was the shorter of the two men—took hold of her long blonde hair and jerked her head back.

So sudden was Latimer's dive in Bremner's direction he almost tore loose from the two men holding him. But not quite. At sight of this, the red-bearded giant who was on the girl's other side let out a huge bellow of laughter. Not at Latimer's action, but at the frightened retreat of Bremner.

The enraged Gestapo man leaped upon the defenseless Latimer and hammered him with his club-like fists. Latimer's mouth and nose gushed crimson under the pounding of Bremner's fists.

He tried to evade the punches, but the guards held him tightly. A red mist swam before his eyes. His ears caught the sound of Virginia's screams and the gargantuan laughter of Red-beard. And a merciful blackness closed down over his senses.

HE BECAME conscious to the sound of a voice cursing. Benjy had lost none of his fluency in that respect. He opened his eyes and took in his surroundings. He was lying on the hard-packed earth which served as a floor for the grass hut. A fire burned redly in an iron brazier in one corner of the hut. He felt a wet cloth gently brushing his bruised and cut skin. He turned his body, and the pain in his side made him go sick to his stomach.

Virginia was kneeling beside him. A pan of water was on the ground near her.

He winced as she applied another wet cloth.

"Here, Benjy," he said to the young sailor who was angrily pacing back and forth past his head, "give me a hand up, will you?"

Latimer stood erect, swaying a little. His face felt as though it had gone through a clothes wringer and his side ached.

"What did Bremner do after knocking me out? Give me the boot?" he asked.

"Yeah!" Benjy said wrathfully. "He give you the boot! But he made sure those guys were holding you good before he did. And if it hadn't been for Miss Virginia here, he'd'a probably kicked your head in."

"If it hadn't been for Virginia? What do you mean?" Latimer asked.

Benjy's voice held admiration as he explained, "Why, when she saw what that dirty—what that rat was gonna do, she jerked away from that red-bearded lug and jumped the Nazi. He just gave you the boot once and she was on him like a wildcat. Old Red-beard came running up and broke them. But not before the rat clipped her once."

"Clipped her!" Latimer's voice held such a depth of anger, Benjy backed away from him in startled surprise.

"Sure he did. Look at her jaw."

The girl had turned her back to them. Latimer gently pulled her around and saw the swollen area against the warm brown of her skin. It was already turning yellow.

Benjy cleared his throat and voiced the question which was bothering Latimer also.

"What happens next? How do we blow outa this joint?"

"I don't know, Benjy," Latimer said, "looks like we'll have to hold a sort of council of war, right here.

"First: Virginia, suppose you tell us how you got here. And who Mr. Red-beard is?"

"IT WAS the strangest thing," the girl began, her eyes frowning, "but when I first opened my eyes, I thought I was dead. Everything was so peaceful and quiet. The only sound I could hear was that of the water moving softly and the calls of birds. I looked up and saw that red mist, but when I sat up, I felt a terrible pain at the back of my head. I must have fainted then, because the next thing I knew I was being carried by two natives through the trees. When we got here, I saw that Bremner was with us also. But neither you nor Benjy was there. I won't tell you how I felt or what I thought." She stopped for a moment to gather the threads of her story together again.

"We were brought to the central hut and that terrible red-bearded man came out. I heard Bremner call out in a surprised voice, 'Von Schultz'. Von Schultz

walked over to him and after looking at him for a minute recognized him. It seems that this Von Schultz commanded a U-boat in the last war, and was reported sunk. Bremner was some sort of army officer then and they knew each other.

"Bremner called him aside and they whispered together for a while. Whatever Von Schultz was telling him was not to his liking because I could see his ugly red face go pale. Von Schultz thought it was very funny though, because he kept laughing all through their talk. Finally Von Schultz called over several of the natives and gave them instructions. Later I was told that they were to find you two and bring you here.

"I was brought to this hut and kept under guard while Bremner went off with Von Schultz. Then later the two of them came here and brought me out and I saw you and Benjy and oh, I'm so afraid! There is something horrible going on with this Von Schultz. He frightens me more than Bremner ever did. And these natives. They act like they're not quite alive."

"Easy now, honey," Latimer cautioned, as he heard hysteria rise in her voice. "That isn't going to help. Keep your chin up. We'll make out."

"Sure, Miss Virginia," Benjy added his bit to the conversation, "the professor here'll figure out the angles. We're a cinch to duck this joint."

The girl laughed aloud at Benjy's figure of speech. And when she asked, "Do you know, Mr. Latimer, that it's still a mystery to me what you're a professor of," there was a bright note of unaccustomed gaiety in her voice.

Latimer looked startled at her question.

"Good Lord," he said, slapping his forehead with his free hand, "of course. Well allow me then to present myself, formally." He burlesqued a cavalier-like bow and said, "Hugh Latimer, Professor of Botany, on leave from Crandall University, at your service, Madame Darnell and Messieur Shore.' '

A ripple of laughter from the three broke the tension under which they had been, since their capture. But at the sound of Von Schultz's bull-like bellow, they all turned quickly, to face his giant figure standing hugely within the doorway.

"So," he shouted, "you are all happy to be together. That is good! I like laughter and gaiety. These natives, pah! They are good only for work. But forgive me! It is so seldom that I can play host to white men and women. You are hungry?"

He looked questioningly at them and when he saw Benjy licking dry lips, his huge laughter rang out on their startled ears. Latimer's keen eyes had been making a careful appraisal of Von Schultz, all the while he had been talking. He saw a huge mountain of a man, at least four inches over six feet, weighing well over two-hundred and fifty pounds. Naked to the waist, his great chest, wet with sweat, rippled with muscles. And every time he let loose with that great shout of laughter, his belly shook and tumbled in time to it. Latimer also saw that his beard had been dyed with some kind of vegetable dye.

But it was on Von Schultz's eyes that Latimer's searching look rested longest. Narrow set, they hung under dark crags of thick black hair. And despite his jovial laugh, there was something disquieting, even sinister, in their unwavering black intensity.

"I don't trust you," Latimer thought, "nor your act of being a good samaritan. You've got some purpose behind your welcoming gestures and I'm going slow till I find it out."

VON SCHULTZ thrust his head out of the doorway and they heard him bellowing some sort of orders. Then he turned back to his guests.

"Sit down," he commanded, "sit down, my friends. Soon there will be food and drink. And I can see Professor Latimer is bursting with questions he wants to ask me." And suiting the action to the words, he lowered himself to the ground, folded his trunk-like legs under him.

The three seated themselves again. And Latimer asked with some surprise, "How did you know my name?" He did not wait for the other's reply. He knew the answer. "Of course. Bremner! I suppose you know all there is to know about us."

"No, not all," Von Schultz said enigmatically, "but enough: yes—enough."

"Well," said Latimer, "since you are so willing to answer my questions, let's start with an easy one. Where are we?"

"The natives call this island Tanoa. Where it is I do not know, because the red mist surrounds it on all sides. Nor have I ever seen it on any chart or map."

Latimer puzzled over Von Schultz's answer. It had, as a matter of fact, answered nothing.

"That red mist. How did it ever form and just what is it?" he asked, and hoped the answer to this would be more enlightening than the other.

"That red mist?" Von Schultz repeated Latimer's question. "I can only tell you the legend the stupid natives told me about it. That once, long ago, a flaming star fell upon the island. It brought the mist with it; a sort of mantle, they said. The mantle stayed, out beyond the reef. They also tell that when the star struck, it sent out a red dust, and wherever the dust landed the red lotus bloomed. The red lotus bloomed," he said again, and his voice rumbled deep within him, his eyes blazing beneath their thick eyebrows. "My lovely red lotus flowers."

"Red lotus?" asked Latimer. "There are no such blooms; at least to my knowledge."

"Perhaps not to your knowledge," returned the other, "but on Tanoa, all lotus are red. And tomorrow I shall take you to my castle, beyond the hill. There you will see them And smell them too, if the wind is right."

Latimer felt a hidden meaning in Von Schultz's words. But before he could ask what he meant, a half-dozen native women came in, each bearing a large wooden platter. Silently they came in and placed their platters before the seated group and, as silently, left the diners to serve themselves.

Nor did the three need an invitation to begin. The water and biscuit fare of the lifeboat had left aching hollows where their stomachs had once been. They attended very thoroughly to the chicken, roast young pig and fruits which filled the platters.

VON SCHULTZ laughed as he ate. He devoured his food with a huge chomping, grunting and sweating over his work. Benjy's eyes grew round with wonder as he watched him tear a quarter from a chicken, stuff it into his mouth, and chew it down; pausing only long enough to spit the bones to one side.

Latimer and the others waited for Von Schultz to finish. When he did, he wiped his mouth on his hairy forearms, groaned, then said, "Well, that was good. Is there something else you want to know?"

"Yes," Latimer said coldly. "I want to know the truth. Not this—this poppycock you've been telling us about falling stars, red lotus and castles."

Von Schultz looked into his angry face and rocked back and forth with laughter

"Oh," he said, wiping his eyes, "it will do me good to have you around, Professor! You find it incredible, don't you? But there it is, you know. The red mist, the red flower, and tomorrow, I promise you, my castle."

With that he arose to his feet. Latimer, also rose and walked over to him until they stood only inches apart.

"Before you go, Von Schultz, one more question. What do you intend to do with us?"

Von Schultz looked down at him for a silent few seconds, then said, "Tomorrow, you'll know," and turned to leave.

Latimer swung him around before he had taken a single step.

"Not tomorrow, right now" he demanded

Von Schultz no longer looked jovial. He looked, instead, like a monstrous engine of destruction as he glowered down at Latimer.

"Perhaps put you to work—with the rest of my slaves," he said, and placing his huge hand against Latimer, shoved.

Latimer was sent sprawling backward, to come to rest against a wall of the hut. Before he could recover, Von Schultz was gone.

A long whistle of awe came from Benjy. "It's a good thing he didn't slug you, Professor. He'd'a put you right through the wall."

Latimer got up. "It looks like we'll have to use brains not brawn, against Mr. Red-beard." He began to feel his jaw and mouth, wincing slightly as he touched tender parts. The pain in his side had subsided, but it still ached a little.

"I'll say this, though," he added, "I haven't taken so much punishment since college football. And I'm not going to take much more."

He noticed the tired lines in Virginia's face. And saw, too, that Benjy was beginning to droop

"Time to turn in, folks," he announced. "Might as well get as much rest as we can."

He dragged out a quantity of ferns lying in a corner of the hut and arranged a bed for the girl. He threw his jacket over her to keep her warm. Then he and Benjy lay down and fell into a deep and sound sleep.

A WOMAN'S soft voice awakened him. "The Master is waiting," she had said. Latimer stretched and was glad to note that his side was all right. But his mouth and jaws still ached. A puzzled frown appeared on his face. And the certainty of a thought which had been troubling him grew more real now.

Virginia was sitting up in her bed of ferns, a pout disturbing her lips without distracting from their loveliness.

"I wish I had a comb with me," she said.

Latimer smiled and walked over to awaken Benjy. The native woman, whose voice had awakened him started out of the hut saying, "The Master awaits your coming."

Von Schultz and Bremner were standing in front of a group of at least fifty natives. Von Schultz stepped forward to meet the three as they came out. Latimer saw that he was in good humor again. Bremner, however, appeared nervous, even frightened. He could see a muscle twitch in the Nazi's face.

"Good morning, my friends," Von Schultz's booming voice greeted them, "I hope you slept well."

The red beard parted in a grin to disclose yellow uneven teeth.

"We will not have breakfast, because in a few hours we will be at the castle.

I am anxious to show you the wonders of Tanoa. You, Professor, and Miss Darnell will ride with me."

Linking arms with the girl and Latimer, he marched off. The ranks of natives opened for his passing, and followed as he set out for the trees. Instead of the ladders which Latimer expected, Von Schultz took them to an incline which led up to the middle terrace. Here a dozen men were waiting with litters. Latimer felt a twinge of pity for the two carriers who hoisted Von Schultz's massive frame within his litter to their shoulders. Virginia and he stepped into their litters and, at a signal, the bearers started off on a run. Latimer looked back to see Benjy and Bremner being carried in litters not far behind them.

So wide was this unusual tree-highway that the bearers were able to carry them abreast. Latimer was only waiting for an opening to begin his questioning again. Only this time he resolved to be more diplomatic, so as not to arouse Von Schultz's anger again. He had not long to wait.

Von Schultz had been staring at Virginia in open mouthed admiration. He heaved a windy sigh, and said introspectively, "It will be good to see and hear a white woman again. Twenty-seven years is a long time to be away from civilization. Only now do I realize what I have missed."

"You've been here twenty-seven years?" asked Latimer.

"Yes," replied the other.

"How did you find this place?"

Latimer felt the desire to talk in Von Schultz's voice.

"I didn't find it," Von Schultz said cryptically. "It found me! Let me tell you my story, Professor, and you also, Miss Darnell. It will help to pass the time and perhaps answer certain questions in the professor's mind.

"I WAS in command of a German submarine in 1917. On a certain night we spotted a freighter and after following for a while, got close enough to send a torpedo into it. It wasn't enough, though, and I had to drive another nail in that coffin. But before it sank, their wireless operator was able to send out an S.O.S. Several destroyers arrived on the scene and somehow picked up my trail.

"The first I knew of them was the concussions of depth charges around me. I was cruising in eight fathoms of water at the time and immediately ordered a crash dive, down to fifteen fathoms. Those depth charges killed four men in the torpedo compartment and five in the engine room. Remember that, Professor. That those men were killed then, not later."

He paused for a moment to let the last statement sink in, then went on, "I set the controls at cruising speed and stayed at that depth for several hours. I went into the compartments to see what had happened and saw the dead men there. Just as I came back to my post, I felt the nose of the submarine go downward and the speed of the boat sharply increase.

"From that second on we went through hell. It seemed as though the ship was in the grip of some terrible magnet. It was twisted and spun about as though it was a match. And understand this, that although a hurricane can be raging directly above you, at fifteen fathoms there is only the smallest of disturbances.

"Inside the submarine the dead and the living were thrown around like dice in a box. I was thrown against a pipe which had been broken in two, with my throat striking against the razor-sharp edge of the broken piece. My last remembrance was of the blood gushing from my torn throat, filling my

mouth, and pouring out like a fountain.

"When I came to, we were resting in the calm waters inside the reef. And when I stepped up on the deck, *my entire crew, do you understand; my entire crew, followed me.*"

Latimer felt his throat open and close convulsively as Von Schultz finished his tale. His mouth felt as though all the saliva had dried up; and his voice was hoarse with a strain as he said, "But you said that nine men were—" he could not finish. There was no need to. He knew Von Schultz was telling the truth. The same thing had happened to himself. To Virginia, Benjy, Bremner—

They had died, yet they were alive. Didn't they breathe, talk, feel and think as they had before? Except for the amazing episode of the healing flesh, there had been no material changes in their bodies. Von Schultz had aged normally in the years of his stay on the island. Therefore, it was plain that although one could die, *he could live to die again.*

He was becoming dizzy from these mad speculations. Another thought crossed his mind, to add to his worries. Did Virginia understand the full impact of Von Schultz's story? He leaned over to look beyond the huge bulk of the red-bearded one's torso. Virginia was staring at Von Schultz with a doubting look.

Latimer could see that she didn't believe Von Schultz. She shook her head slowly from side to side like a marionette on a string, as though to clear it of some terrible thought. Then she leaned back and lay staring broodingly ahead.

There was something brutally callous in the look Von Schultz bent on her relaxed body before he turned to face Latimer again. But neither Latimer nor the girl saw that look.

VON SCHULTZ resumed where he left off in his story.

"I could see a line of natives on the beach. They were on their knees with their faces pressed against the sand. To them, we were gods, arisen from the sea. It was evident they had never seen a white man before. And if they had, never ones who arrived in a submarine. We stepped ashore and they brought us gifts of fruit. Their chief, Mawtaw, bade us welcome; in fluent German."

Latimer broke in with a startled exclamation, "German! Then they speak German and English too!"

Von Schultz laughed, but silently this time. Only his shaking body showed it.

"Yes. I was surprised to hear my mother tongue spilled from their heathen mouths. But when I asked old Mawtaw where they had learned the language, he said, 'German, you call it? There is only one tongue spoken on Tanoa. It is the language of the dead!'

"One of my men could speak Spanish. I commanded him to address the chief in that language. And when he spoke I understood what Mawtaw meant. Because I, who knew no Spanish, understood every word that same from his mouth. You see, on Tanoa, all languages are one. The language of the dead."

"I see," muttered Latimer. But he *didn't* see.

A vagrant breeze came through the trees, bringing with it a remembered odor. And with every step the bearers took, the odor became heavier and more cloying.

Latimer was reminded of his returning to life on the beach. That breeze which he had felt was thick with this fragrance. The very air seemed alive with it now, and he had the strangest notion that it was entering into every pore of his body. His mind felt a weariness, which was curiously peaceful, descend on it.

Von Schultz looked closely at Latimer. He, too, noticed the odor but, peculiarly, was unaffected by it.

"Ah!" he said, "the wind is bringing to us the fragrance of the red lotus. A most delightful odor, is it not, Professor?"

"Huh?" asked Latimer, stupidly.

"I said, do you smell the fragrance of the red lotus?" replied Von Schultz.

"Yes — I — can — smell — it — now," Latimer said, slowly pausing between words. It was a most peculiar feeling that possessed him. That he was being hypnotized by the scent of the flowers. *Being hypnotized by the lotus.* The phrase rang a warning bell in his mind. He exerted dominance over his mind by a fierce effort of his will. He would not be hypnotized by either man or flower. And his eyes cleared of the mists which had arisen to cloud them.

Von Schultz saw the light of reason return to Latimer. He shrugged impatiently, but the wolfish grin still remained on his face. The grin which had appeared when he saw how the odor of the flower had first affected Latimer.

"It is a peculiar virtue of my red lotus," Von Schultz stated, "that it can, through its overpowering odor alone, produce a state bordering on hypnosis. For instance, no birds sing where it blooms. Yet they fly to and sit upon its branches. You will find the shrub to be of great interest, Professor."

"I am sure I will," replied Latimer aloud. But to himself, he said, "Yes, and I will also find what makes it so interesting to you, that you call them *your* red lotus."

LATIMER noticed that the trees were thinning out. At last there were no more trees and they came out into a sort of shallow valley. His eyes grew bright with astonishment at what he saw.

To his right, ascending in a long, gradual slope, was a large hill. The upper quarter of this hill seemed to blaze with red color.

"The red lotus," Von Schultz commented, seeing Latimer's stare.

To his left, Latimer saw a shorter, but steeper hill. Shaped like an upturned bread loaf, its top had been sheared level. It looked very much like an Arizona *mesa,* with its eroded, barren appearance. Perched on its top, he saw, was a strange looking stone edifice. It looked very much like a stone prison. Long, narrow openings in the stone surface of its three stories seemed to be windows. But the sun threw back no reflections from any glass in the embrasures.

"And that, I presume, is your castle," Latimer said.

"Yes, that is my castle," replied Von Schultz.

"Unlovely sort of place, isn't it?"

"That depends on your ideas of beauty, Professor," the other returned.

"I'm sorry if I can't think of a dungeon being beautiful," Latimer ironically replied.

They remained silent while their bearers, who had evidently been instructed to do so, ran up the long steep incline which led to the castle's entrance.

As soon as the litters were placed on the ground, Latimer hastened to Virginia and helped her up. He was disturbed to see her in an obvious state of shock. Her eyes were listless and her movements mechanical. She seemed to find trouble in standing erect. Latimer put his arm around her and when Von Schultz came over, said, "We'd better get Miss Darnell to bed. I'm afraid your story was a little too much for her, coupled with what she's gone through."

Von Schultz said, "Bring her in. It is

the lotus fragrance. I'll have a couple of native women take care of her. She'll be all right in a few hours."

Latimer lifted her limp figure in his arms and followed Von Schultz through the stone entrance of his castle. Virginia's mouth and chin rested warmly against his throat. He almost dropped her—when her lips whispered against his ear, "Careful, I'm just acting a part. Watch Von Schultz. He's got something up his sleeve."

He was able to control himself as he continued to follow Von Schultz through a large square-shaped room and up a curving stone staircase. They arrived at what apparently was a bedroom, for in it was an excellent specimen of native handicraft, an imitation of a four poster bed. It was made from thin saplings, a thick pile of ferns lay on a closely woven vine spring. Latimer laid the lax figure of the girl on it.

Von Schultz stepped to one of the two narrow windows. He called Latimer over and pointed to something below, saying, "There it is, Professor. My submarine, lying at its eternal anchorage."

LATIMER looked down the sheer face of the house and cliff. Just below him he could see a shallow harbor, several hundred feet long. A small submarine rested on the water's surface. He could also see a small break in the reef, just wide enough for the submarine to get through. But the water came through this break with the express train speed of a mill stream. The bright sun, reflecting in a golden glow on the still waters of the harbor, lent a false impression of peace and security to the scene.

Latimer commented on this. "Strange," he said, "but I haven't seen any clouds over this island."

"Nor have I, in all the twenty-seven years I have been here," answered Von Schultz. "Nor does it ever rain. Yet things grow and flowers and trees look eternally fresh and green. Something in the atmosphere, set up by the red mist, protects us from the elements, no doubt."

Von Schultz turned away from the window with a sudden abrupt gesture.

"Come," he said. "Bremner and your young sailor friend are below now. I'll have the women bring food up here for Miss Darnell."

Latimer followed him down the staircase again and into the large square room. Benjy and Bremner were seated at a table which had been brought in. He also saw that a number of natives had come in and were ranged around the walls in silent watchfulness.

"My faithful retainers," Von Schultz said ironically.

Benjy looked sick and frightened. Bremner had evidently told him the story of Von Schultz. And probably elaborated on it. For that matter, Bremner didn't look like he was enjoying the situation too well either.

Now that he was away from the girl, Von Schultz broke into his usual loud talk. His laugh boomed around the room as they sat down.

"Cheer up, my friend," he said to Bremner, slapping him forcefully on his back. "The world has not come to an end for you. Life here may not hold all that you're accustomed to, but it has its good points."

"And speaking of life here," Latimer said, "what are your intentions as far as we're concerned."

"All in good time, Professor Latimer," Von Schultz replied. "Right now, food is what I want."

Benjy shook his head in admiration of the big man's appetite.

Von Schultz clapped his hands and women began arriving with platters of

chicken, pig and fruit. As far as Latimer was concerned, they were the same women who had waited on them the night before. At least they appeared so in the silence and mechanical motions they went through.

Among the fruits, Latimer noticed a peculiar looking, red colored one which resembled a banana. Curiosity impelled him to ask what it was.

"Oh that," replied Von Schultz, "is the fruit of the lotus. Try it. You'll find it's delicious."

Latimer bit into it and as Von Schultz had said, it was delicious. Benjy and Bremner also tried the lotus fruit. So good was it that Latimer found himself reaching for a second and then a third.

It was immediately after he swallowed the third one that he began to feel strangely. He pivoted his head toward where Benjy and Bremner were sitting; and noticed what a great effort it took to do so. Both Benjy and Bremner had stopped eating and were looking empty-eyed before them.

"They look exactly like the natives do with that far-away lost look in their eyes," was his thought. "I wonder if I look the same."

VON SCHULTZ stood up now and looked down at the three men sitting so silently at the table. His laughter rang out loud and wild in the room.

"Now you know the secret of the red lotus, Professor. You have tasted of it and you, too, have become my slave. I promised you that I would put you to work with them and I will. Get up! All of you!"

Latimer tried with all of his will not to obey. But he found himself erect, just as Benjy and Bremner were. His arms hung loose a his sides and he seemed to bend a little at the knees.

Von Schultz looked gloatingly at them for a few seconds, then said, "Today you will go into the village, and work with the men gathering fruit. Tomorrow, I will put you to work—at labor. Carrying stones up to my castle."

He called over one of the natives standing against the wall. "Take them away," he said, and sat down again to finish his meal.

Three natives stepped forward and each taking a white man under an arm, led him out of the castle. They took a well-traveled trail which wound around for a distance about a mile and came to an end in a large village. The drug which the fruit contained had done its work well. The three white men in their walk and feelings were indistinguishable from the natives. But a small part of Latimer's brain still functioned. It wasn't large enough to command his body to break the spell, but it did permit Latimer to observe what went on.

It was a village, with about thirty large huts set in a great circle around an open space about a hundred yards in diameter. Latimer noticed that it seemed to be occupied only by women and dogs. And even the dogs moved in that same jerky abnormal way the humans did. One of the guards called to a woman.

"Where is Lato?"

Her face was dull and animalish looking. "In his hut," she said.

"Call him out. I have three more here to help pick the fruit."

Without a word, she turned and stepped into one of the huts. She reappeared in a moment followed by a little old man. She went back to whatever she had been doing when she was called. The old man came over and the guard told him, "Take them into the forest to pick fruit. Tomorrow they will help carry stones."

The old man cackled in a wheezy voice, "Oh, good. They look like they

were strong enough. Yes, they do look that. Well, come along then," he said and started off into the forest.

The three men followed him in single file as he picked his unerring way through the tangled underbrush. Thorns and sharp vines tore at them but they felt no pain. Nor did they make any attempt to wipe the blood from the cuts which were inflicted on them.

The path which the old man was following led upward toward that part of the hill where the lotus bloomed. Soon they came to the first cluster of shrubs, which grew to a height of about eight feet. The odor from the flowers was overwhelming, but the three men were strangely unaffected by it. In a few minutes they arrived in a region where the shrubs grew more profusely. They seemed, in fact, to be the only vegetation that did grow here.

Latimer saw the sweat-shiny backs of a number of men. They were all picking fruit and placing the fruit in a small basket on the ground before them.

The old man now took the three to a number of small woven baskets lying in a pile to one side.

"Each of you take one of these," he commanded, "and go to a tree. Pick until the basket is full, then bring it back and take another basket. I will tell you when to stop. Go now to your picking."

The three followed his directions, like well-drilled robots. And each, basket under his arm, disappeared in search of a shrub to pick from.

LATIMER found himself before one of the shrubs and reached up to take hold of the fruit hanging just over his head. A thousand needles seemed to have exploded into his fingers. The fruit was encased within a shell of thorns so sharp that the pain from their pricking penetrated through the hypnosis he was under. Yet, so powerful was the spell of the drug that he continued to pull at the red fruit until it came loose from the thorns.

He didn't know how many baskets he filled. He only knew that he had been commanded to pick until the old man came back.

The sun disappeared behind the red mist before the old man returned. He called Latimer and the other two over to him.

"Now fill those large baskets over there with the fruit you picked and follow me."

The other pickers were already doing what the old man told them to. Soon a long line of men came shuffling back to the village, each carrying his large basket of fruit. The baskets were placed in the center of the clearing and the men disappeared into the huts.

Latimer, Benjy and Bremner were given a smaller hut to sleep in. They came in and sat on the hard-packed ground, facing each other. But their eyes were empty of recognition. They simply sat and looked woodenly about them. Soon a woman came in bringing food. They ate mechanically of what lay on the platter. Strangely enough, they seemed to relish most the banana-looking fruit of the lotus. Finishing their meal, they lay down on the ground and fell into a deep and untroubled sleep.

It was sometime in the night that Latimer was awakened by the little dog. He pushed its furry body away from him. But the dog had evidently taken a liking to him. For it came bounding back, frisking about him in short leaps, growling playfully as though it were a game.

That part of Latimer's brain which had remained unimpaired, was frantically sending a message. *"Watch the*

dog! Watch the dog! Watch the dog!" And at last he understood. He was sweating with the strain of the effort it took to concentrate on thinking even a little. But at last he understood.

The dog was leaping about as all normal dogs do. Yet Latimer had seen the natives feed the dogs the fruit also. Then how was it that the fruit did not affect this particular dog?

LATIMER had to find out. He reached out his hand and picked up the pup. He stood up and walked out in that stiff legged sway which they all used, to where the fruit lay in the basket. Reaching down he picked up one of the fruit and with a free hand forced it down the dog's throat. Then he placed the dog on the ground to see what happened next.

The drug in the fruit had already taken effect. For the dog had turned and was walking toward the forest. And now his gait was the same as all the others had been. Latimer followed him. The way led deep into the underbrush for several hundred feet. Latimer's face was bleeding again from the new scratches which the thorns gave.

But just ahead of him the dog had stopped and was tearing at a short white plant with his teeth. Whatever was in the plant took effect almost immediately. The dog shook himself for a second, then returned to Latimer. And he saw that the dog was in a playful mood again.

Latimer got down on his knees and tore off some of the white blooms. He didn't hesitate in putting them in his mouth. The flower gave off an acrid smell, but he managed to swallow it. In a few seconds life and reason returned to his body and mind. He could think clearly. His limbs obeyed the commands of his brain again.

"Pup," he said, thankfully, "if there is a heaven for dogs, I hope you'll get there."

He set to work looking for other flowers like that which he had swallowed. In a short while he had collected enough to fill all his pockets. Then he returned to their hut.

He awoke Benjy first. "Here," he commanded, "chew on this flower and swallow it." The boy did as he was told and in a few seconds Latimer saw the blank, wooden look disappear from his eyes. It was the old Benjy who looked wonderingly about him and asked, "What happened, Professor? How did I get here?"

Latimer told him what had happened at Von Schultz's castle. And in conclusion said, "Boy. We've got him licked! These white flowers are an antidote for the drug in the lotus fruit. All we have to do is feed the natives this flower to bring them out of their trance. And the hold that Von Schultz has over them will be broken. After I give this to Bremner, we'll start off with the little old man."

"You're not going to give it to Bremner, are you? Not after what he did to you and Miss Virginia," Benjy asked in surprise.

"Yes I am. We'll need every man. Remember, Von Schultz still has at least fifty men up there with him, all armed," Latimer answered.

He awakened Bremner and gave him the antidote. It worked on him as it had on Latimer and Benjy.

"Keep quiet and follow us. I'll tell you what to do," Latimer commanded him.

The three men stole softly into Lato's hut. The old man was sound asleep. While Benjy and Bremner held him, Latimer forced the old man to swallow the white flower. And again the miracle of the antidote took place.

"Who are you?" the old man asked.

Latimer told him as much as was possible in a few sentences.

"You want to end the rule of this cruel man, don't you?" asked Latimer.

"Yes," answered Lato. "He has held us in his power for long years. Tell me what to do and it will be done."

"Here are these flowers," Latimer said. "Feed them to those whom you want awakened first. Then bring them here and I will show you where I found these."

THE old man took the flowers and left quickly. In a few moments he returned with a dozen men. They all looked as though they had been awakened from some deep and terrible dream. But their eyes were bright with life. And their movements were free and alive.

"Command us, white man," Lato said. "We're yours, to do with as you wish."

Latimer took them all to where he had found the flowers and set them to collecting as many as they could. They used the little baskets to collect them in and in a short while there were enough to awaken every man in the village.

"Now go and feed these to all the rest and come to the compound in the center of the village. There I will tell you how we can overcome Von Schultz," Latimer told them.

The natives scattered to the various huts, each carrying his little basket of white flowers. It wasn't until they had all gone that Latimer noticed Bremner had disappeared also.

"Where is Bremner?" he asked.

"Gee, I don't know," Benjy replied. "He was here just a few minutes ago."

But Latimer knew where Bremner had gone. To tell Von Schultz of what was taking place.

"Damn it, Benjy, you were right," Latimer swore. "I shouldn't have brought that double-crossing Nazi out of it. Now we've lost the element of surprise."

"You mean we're not going to get Von Schultz, then?" Benjy asked in disappointment.

"Oh yes. We'll get him. And Bremner too. But I'll have to figure out a different means from what I'd planned."

His mind raced over what he remembered about the so-called castle. He snapped his fingers in glee as he remembered what it was that he had seen. He knew how they were to gain entrance. It was going to be risky, but it could be done.

Already the first of the men were beginning to arrive. Soon the village compound was a boiling mass of angry natives. Lato had given the antidote not only to the men but also to the women and even to the dogs.

The women were the bloodthirstiest. It was their voices which were raised loudest in cries of vengeance. But the men, though silent for the most part, were hot in anger. Latimer could see by the light of a number of fires, which had been set by the first women to arrive, that their faces were set in determination.

They were in a great circle about him when Latimer raised his hand for silence.

"People of Tanoa," he cried in a loud voice. They all fell silent as he began to speak. "I have set you free from your bondage. The power which the red lotus has held over you is broken for good. But Von Schultz, the man who made use of that power for his own evil purpose, still walks free."

A confused shout of anger came from the throats of the milling natives. Lato stepped forward to face Latimer.

"Tell us, white man, what we must do," he said.

"VERY well," said Latimer. "Bring three men whom you can trust completely, to my hut. Have the rest scatter and pick up whatever weapons they can find. We'll meet here in a few minutes."

"Now here is my plan," Latimer began. "Von Schultz has about fifty men with him. How many are there of us, Lato?"

The old man turned to the three with him and whispered to them for a second. Then he said, "We are one hundred and fifty, white man."

"Good! That should be enough. The road leading to the castle entrance is about twenty feet across. To either side there is a steep ravine. You, Lato, will take the largest body of men with you in a frontal attack on the road. Two of you," and Latimer pointed to two of the men sitting beside Lato, "will take twenty men each, and climb through the underbrush of the ravine. Keep well hidden until Lato begins his frontal attack. Then fall upon Von Schultz men from the sides. Now you," he said to last of the three, "will pick ten of the youngest and strongest men you have. I have a special task for them. That, my friends, is my plan."

Lato and the three with him nodded their heads in satisfaction and agreement and the parley broke up. Quickly they set about on their appointed tasks and soon they, with Latimer, Benjy and Lato leading them, were on the march. Only the women and dogs remained.

The dawn had sent its first grey light into the darkness when they arrived in the narrow village before the small plateau. Latimer saw that Bremner had done as he had suspected. Von Schultz had been warned of their coming. Huge bonfires had been lighted and all the ground before them was bright in their glow. Latimer saw a thin line of guards, spears held in their hands, stretched across the roadway leading to the castle.

"Well, Lato," he said. "There you are. Do you think you can get through?"

Lato smiled. "I," he said, "am an old man. Life holds little for me. But what sweeter way of dying is there than in fighting my enemy?"

With that he spread his men out and began a cautious advance to get as close as they could, before charging. Lato's lieutenants had already started up the sides of the ravine.

Latimer waited for a minute, then started off through the dense underbrush, Benjy and the eleven others following close behind. In a short while the brush thinned out and soon they found themselves on the beach, below the rear of the castle.

Now Benjy and the rest saw what Latimer had in mind. Although the plateau fell sheer, erosion had formed depressions like narrow trenches. These led to the very top of the plateau. And Latimer had planned to use these trenches as rungs in an earthen ladder to mount to the castle. It was there, he knew, that the real job commenced.

Benjy had been staring at the submarine in the small harbor.

"Well I'll be hanged," he exclaimed, "a German pig boat. And an old one too. About a 1914 model I'd say."

"How do you know so much about submarines, Benjy?" Latimer asked.

"My father worked in a shipyard that was making them. I went to work there when I was seventeen. And the first thing they did was show us one of these babies. An old Dutchman took us on board and explained the workings of the valves and engines. I can even read the dial markings. Do you know, Professor," he said, "you can run one of those things with a crew of three."

"You can," exclaimed Latimer, a wild

idea taking root in his mind.

"It'd be a cinch, boss," Benjy boasted.

Latimer smiled to himself. Then dimly to his ears came the first sounds of battle. It was the signal to begin the ascent of the plateau. They made short work of it and soon they were looking up at the more difficult business of the castle wall.

LATIMER noticed that the first embrasure in the wall was about thirty feet up the face. But the castle had been constructed of rough cut stones, about two feet across. And the native masons had permitted a little amount of hangover to some of them. Just enough for finger grips. It was a risky business, but it could be done. It *had* to be done!

Latimer led the way and saw that Benjy was the very next one to follow. It was a trying ordeal. Latimer's fingers were tender and sore from the cuts of the needle-like thorns, but he forgot his pain and weariness in the climb. He knew if he fell it would be a sheer drop of a hundred and fifty feet to the beach below. Once, in the climb, one of his hands slipped from a finger-hold and he hung by the other until his feet found security in a niche.

At last he came to the goal he sought, the long, narrow open window, and climbed through. One by one the rest followed him. The room was empty and Latimer led them down the stone stairway to the main hall. And there they came on a scene that held them spellbound.

Virginia, a Luger automatic held in one hand, was facing Bremner. Bremner's face was contorted into lines of deep anger.

"It is too late now, my dear," he was saying. "That gun will do you no good. Just as it will do you no good to know that my story about your brother was a lie. You see, your brother died in the wreckage of his plane."

Virginia hadn't noticed him edging ever closer to her while he held her attention by his talk. It was too late when she did, for his fingers were almost on the gun before she could pull its trigger. But neither had seen Latimer and silent group of natives in the doorway.

It was Latimer who leaped on Bremner before he quite got his hands on the gun. But this was not the Bremner of the boat. This was a Bremner who bit and clawed. Who had only one thing in mind—to kill.

Latimer managed to get a grip on Bremner's sweaty throat, but his fingers, weak from their labor on the castle wall, could not hold the grip. Bremner twisted about savagely and now Latimer was on the bottom with Bremner's fingers in a strangle hold on his throat. Blackness was swimming before his eyes. He could feel his tongue swelling in his mouth from the terrible pressure of Bremner's fingers when a loud report rang out. Bremner coughed softly once and rolled away from Latimer.

A little curl of smoke was coming from the gun in Virginia's hand. Latimer leaped to his feet and ran to her.

And then with a huge shout, Von Schultz leaped into the room—and was met by the screaming body of natives. His demoniac blows sent several reeling. But no human could have withstood the savagery of their fury. In a few minutes it was all over.

"Where did you get the gun?" Latimer asked her.

"I found is after the women had left. Von Schultz had evidently forgotten he had it. I hid it in my dress. When the fight began outside, I came down here; Bremner saw me and then you came in."

LATIMER led Virginia out of the room. She walked past what had once been the living body of Von Schultz with averted eyes. The natives, in their fury, had committed unspeakable things to him before he died. Now, their fury spent, they followed Latimer and the girl through the door.

The victorious natives, with Lato at their head, were waiting for them.

"It is all over then?" asked Latimer.

"Yes," the old man answered. "And what are your wishes now, white man? Speak, and whatever you want shall be given you!"

Latimer did not answer, but instead led the girl down the incline and around through the underbrush, until once again they were on the beach of the shallow lagoon. Lato and the natives stood around in a silent throng waiting for Latimer to speak.

"There it is, Virginia," he began. "That will take us from this island."

"Are you mad, Hugh?" she asked in a horrified whisper. "Don't you remember what Von Schultz said? And what we went through?"

"Yes, my dear," he answered. "But no matter what you think, we're going through the red dust."

Latimer turned to Benjy. "Lad," he said. "In spite of what happened when we came through that red area before, are you game to go back? Even if what happened to us when we landed on the beach of this island—doesn't happen again?"

Benjy looked white, but he nodded. "Yeah," he whispered. "I'm game. Let's get cutting. I don't want to spend the rest of my—" he stumbled over the words "—the rest of my life, or whatever it is, here."

"Then come on." Latimer turned to Lato and his people and bid them goodbye. Then they went aboard the ancient German U-boat. Benjy clambered eagerly down the hatchway, and in a few moments his high-pitched voice came floating up to them.

"Everything looks to be in working order. Come on down, and maybe we can get the motors started."

The two descended the hatchway, sealed the entrance behind them. The dull clang of the metal hatch rang hollowly and ominously through the death-like silence of the submarine's hull.

Latimer and Virginia joined Benjy, took up the posts he indicated. Then at his signal they turned levers, wheels, watched dials. And in a moment a muffled beat of motors came from the bowels of the little ship.

"She's going!" exulted Benjy.

Latimer sighed with relief. "Okay, lad, let's get into the control room, and take her out."

Latimer took up his post at the periscope, and at his direction, Benjy maneuvered the sluggish pigboat, creaking in every joint, out of the slip where it had rested for twenty-seven years. Latimer saw Lato and his natives watching fearfully and sadly from the beach, then turned his attention to the wall of red dust out over the open sea.

Nothing could be seen beyond it, but as they approached it, his hair rose on the back of his neck. The water just beneath the dust—Latimer knew all at once it wasn't dust at all, but a form of terrific energy of some sort, forming a shell of hellish torment on this, its inside ring. Outside, it had been thin as they entered it. Here it would be like running squarely into a whirling buzz-saw.

"Keep her going," directed Latimer, giving no sign of what he saw. But his face was white. Benjy looked at him, and his face became tense. He spoke not a word. He licked his lips, but they seemed to remain dry.

NOW a roaring noise began to come through the hull—a noise that was not a noise at all, because it was so low in the auditory scale. It was more like the aura of a devasting force which was approaching nearer and nearer.

Latimer knew the truth as he watched through the periscope. Nothing could pass through that weird area of awful energy and come out on the other side alive! Almost he quailed, turned the ship back. Then he gritted his teeth, kept his eyes glued on the red wall advancing closer and closer—

Shrieking, tearing hell was upon them now. Giant circular saws seemed grinding away at the metal hull, seeking to tear it apart. But somehow it didn't seem to be a physical force. The metal itself buckled and went through weird transformations, but it seemed to remain its general shape, although much tortured.

A scream came from Benjy's lips, and Latimer's eyes jerked from the eyepiece of the periscope. Benjy was writhing in awful agony, and even as Latimer watched, his body contorted incredibly, and there came the sound of snapping bones. As though he was passing through a field of force that altered every atom of his make-up, sought to tear him to shreds. And in Benjy's bloody face Latimer saw death! Benjy was dead!

Then Latimer's courage gave way. He whirled toward the steering gear, to turn the ship back. But he was too late. With an awful, tortured scream, Virginia reeled toward him, but fell to the floor before she reached him, her body caught in the invisible force. Once more Latimer heard the sound of snapping bones, and he heard the sound of his own voice screaming in utter terror as he leaped toward the stricken girl. Then, with unutterable agony, the force reached him, and in a whirling wave of blackness he sank down into nothingness . . .

ALL WAS quiet in the ship. The muffled sound of the motors came with the certainty that tortured pistons fought against warped piston walls, and were failing. Almost they seemed to stop, but always they managed to beat on just one more stroke.

Latimer was aware of that first. And he lay there, eyes closed, not trying to associate the sound with anything else. Not until it stopped. With a last groan the motors stopped. Latimer struggled to sit up. He looked around him, saw Benjy lying quietly, head pillowed on one arm, as though asleep. He was asleep! His breathing was deep and regular.

"Virginia!" Latimer moaned. He struggled to a standing position, saw Virginia lying on her side, her eyes wide as she stared at him. "You're alive!" he gasped. "Oh, Virginia, we're alive!"

She sat up as he came to her. "Yes," she said wonderingly. "We are. But how?"

He held her close. "I think I can explain it," he said. "But let's wake Benjy first, and find out where we are."

But it was unnecessary to wake Benjy. He rolled over, stared at them a moment, then got up. "If I'm dead," he declared, "I'm glad of it. That pain was something I never want to stand again."

They went up on deck. All about them was the open sea, and nowhere in sight was any land, nor any red cloud of dust. Off on the horizon was a black smudge.

"Ship, ahoy!" yelled Benjy. For many moments they watched, saw that the smudge was getting larger. "Coming this way!" said Benjy at last, voicing the answer to the question they had

all been asking themselves.

"Yes," said Latimer. "It looks as though it can't miss us."

VIRGINIA turned to him. "But what about us?" she asked. "How is it that we are alive? I can understand the island. Somehow, on that island, there was a power that restored life. But certainly there is no such power out here in our own world. How, then, did we come to life again?"

"I don't exactly know," said Latimer, "but here's my idea on it. Remember what Von Schultz said about a legend of a meteor? Well, meteors come from space. They are vagrant pieces of stone or metal that may have traveled through space for so many years that the distance could not even be imagined. How can we know but what life wherever that meteor comes from is not something different than life here? What if it were exactly the opposite? What if life were death, and death were life?"

"What's that again?" asked Benjy.

"It's just this," said Latimer. "Let's say that meteor, obeying natural laws of life directly in opposition to our own, landed on that island. Now, the influence of it might be great enough to reverse the natural life-law of the island. In its descent, it killed all the population, but because death is really life where it came from, the transition ended in life for the inhabitants, not death. They died, but that made them live. Don't you see? If they hadn't died, they would have been dead."

Benjy frowned, then his eyes lit in a smile. "Sounds reasonable," he said cheerfully, "even if I don't get it!"

"But what about us?" objected Virginia.

"Simple," said Latimer. "We were alive while on the island, but alive with a life that was really death, insofar as our own natural laws were concerned. So, when we passed through the barrier, and were *killed*—deprived of our life force natural to that other universe—we really were taking on what is normal life, to this world. In other words, if we hadn't died, coming through the barrier, we would have been dead when we reached the other side. But we did die, and therefore, we are alive."

Benjy swallowed hard. "Mr. Latimer, would you do me a favor?" he said hoarsely.

"What is it?"

"Let's not talk about it any more. It gives me the creeps. I'm only a plain, ordinary seaman, and right now I feel alive and okay. Let's just forget the whole thing, and talk about that ship that's coming. For instance, I could use a nice big stack of wheatcakes and maple syrup right now!"

"Looks like you'll get them," observed Latimer with a smile. "That ship coming up is one of our own battlewagons, or I never saw the stars and stripes!"

Benjy jumped, uttered a cry of alarm. All at once he stripped off his shirt and waved it wildly in the air.

"What's the matter?" asked Latimer.

"Matter!" yelled Benjy. "If I know those lads on that ship, they'll start shooting first and ask questions afterward. This is a Jerry sub we're on!"

Latimer jerked off his shirt and began waving too. Virginia looked about a moment, then began waving her hand. Latimer looked at her, then stopped waving his shirt. "Quit waving your hand," he said. "They've seen us, and I won't have you flirting with any of those boys!"

Virginia stopped waving. "Oh, Hugh!" she said.

"Oh, you, yourself!" said Latimer. Then he kissed her.

The Needle Points to DEATH

By GERALD VANCE

Jeff was about to lose both his life and his wife. Then a wavering needle pointed to an odd solution!

JEFF MORAN made several last-minute adjustments on the square apparatus which was in position on his lab bench. The equipment was constructed of gleaming metal and its four smooth sides were studded with rheostats and gauges. On top of the box-like device was a calibrated bar that recorded a measurement of temperature down to within a fractional decimal point of absolute zero. There was a barometric gauge above this, and a sensitive pressure indicator.

Jeff's lean face was anxious as he studied the equipment and made the last final checks. Everything was right. He'd know in a few more moments whether his months of research and work had achieved a practical result.

Twenty thousand miles above the tiny Venusian weather-base his partner, Bill Dexter, was circling slowly in a space ship, waiting for word from Jeff.

A door opened behind him and Jeff turned quickly. Ann, his wife, smiled at him as she came toward him.

"Kind of jumpy, aren't you, mister?"

"I guess so," Jeff said, feeling his nerves slowly relaxing again. He knew he was keyed up to an impossible tension—had been for the last few months. It hadn't been easy for Ann, he knew, but if things went well today, they could both forget the harrowing, nervous strain of those months.

"You're about ready for the final test, aren't you?" Ann asked.

Jeff nodded. "Dexter's waiting for my signal right now. We'll know in a few minutes—one way or the other."

Ann put her hand on his arm. "Jeff, if things don't turn out the way we hope, it won't really matter to us. We'll just go on trying until it does."

Jeff patted her shoulder and smiled into her eyes. At moments like this he realized how lucky he was to have Ann at his side. She was a small girl, with a quick smile and short brown hair, and in her leather trousers and shirt she looked like a young boy.

"I think I've got it this time," he said, "but there's always a chance I overlooked something."

"I wish I understood more about

"Careful!" Jeff warned. "One touch of that and you're a corpse!"

your work," Ann said. "Sometimes I feel that you'd like to talk to me about things, but can't because I'm such a ninny."

"That's nonsense," Jeff grinned. "You're the perfect listener and that's all any scientist wants. Anyway, this device isn't particularly complex. It's simply a means to determine the temperature in space at any given time. You know, of course, that the temperature in the void is always pretty close to absolute zero; but it would be a great help in rocket construction and navigation if we could know that temperature exactly, especially in areas like this where there is considerable variation. If my reasoning and work has been correct the Allied Research Council will have me on its staff inside of two weeks to superintend mass production of the *altoscope*. And that will be living again for you, honey. This drab hole is no place for a woman."

"I've never minded," Ann said.

"You'd say that anyway," Jeff said. "But you'll appreciate Earth a lot more after your two years here."

HE TURNED to the radio switch and contacted Dexter. In a minute his partner's brash, confident voice was in the room.

"All set, Jeff?"

"Yes. Let me check your position again."

"Twenty thousand miles on the head, northeast of the base by 21 degrees. Got it?"

"Okay. Now what's the temperature reading?"

There was a short silence and Jeff felt a film of perspiration beading his brow as he waited. Finally Dexter's voice came.

".005," he said. "Check?"

"Got it," Jeff said.

He wiped his hands after he made a notation of the figures on a chart. Then he turned to the box-like device on the bench and slowly closed a switch. The lab seemed unnaturally still as the delicate registering needle began to flicker back and forth across the calibrated bar.

He could feel his heart beating loudly and rapidly and his hands were clenched tightly. Finally the swinging needle came to a stop and Jeff bent quickly down and read the number. He felt a sudden singing sensation in his ears.

"Ann!" he yelled. "Look!"

Ann's head was close to his as she bent down and he could see the happy, excited flush on her cheeks as she checked the number.

"Oh, Jeff," she said breathlessly, "how wonderful!"

The needle was pointing squarely at the numerals, .005. It was all over.

He signaled Dexter excitedly.

"Dex," he shouted, "it worked! Can you hear me?"

There was a short pause. Then: "Sure I can hear you. Congratulations. You'll be the big shot of Allied Research now for sure."

Jeff didn't miss the bitterness in his partner's voice. Bill Dexter was a good enough scientist, but he had a peculiar streak in him. He resented other people's good luck, and he had the idea that he had been shelved away in an unimportant spot because he lacked the right connections.

"I suppose," he went on, "you'll clear out of here fast enough now that your luck has turned."

"That won't be up to me," Jeff said. "Anyway the *altoscope* hasn't really been proven yet. I want to make quite a few more tests before I consider it right. Maybe this was just a fluke."

He felt annoyed at himself for practically apologizing to Dexter for his own success.

"I'm sure it's no fluke," Dexter said, after a moment. "You aren't the kind who makes mistakes. Great scientists never do. They leave them for suckers like me who haven't an uncle or brother on the Council."

HIS voice went off with a click. Jeff signaled him again, but the set was dead. He turned to find Ann regarding him with a worried little smile.

"Dexter sounded rather bitter," she said.

"I know. It's too bad he has to take it this way, but that isn't my fault."

Ann turned away and said quietly, "I'll be glad to get away from here for one reason."

"What's that?"

"Dexter."

"I thought you two got along all right," Jeff said with a puzzled frown. His face hardened swiftly and he put his hands on her shoulders and turned her to face him. "Did he ever give you any trouble?"

"Oh, nothing like that," Ann said. She shrugged and tried to smile. "May be I'm just being a silly woman, but he looks at me tometimes with that arrogant smile of his and I feel—oh, I don't know how to say what I mean."

"I know," Jeff said. "We'll be gone soon, but if he ever bothers you I'll break him over my knee."

"I shouldn't have said anything to you about it," Ann said. "You've got enough on your mind without worrying about your temperamental wife. Now go on with your work. I'll fix you some lunch."

Jeff was busy recording the results of the experiment when Dexter walked in. He was a big man with wide shoulders and wavy blond hair. His blue eyes were slightly mocking as he nodded to Jeff.

"Feel pretty good I imagine," he said. "No more of this life for you."

"I feel good," Jeff said evenly, "but not because I may get a little more comfortable job through this work of mine. I'm thinking about the additional safety this device will bring to space navigation. If it saves one life it'll be well worth the time and labor I've spent on it."

"Hear, hear," Dexter said jeeringly. "Save that for the banquets when you get to Earth."

He sauntered over to the lab bench and studied the gleaming instrument with an odd look in his eye. His attention was centered on the red needle that indicated the temperature.

"I've got to hand it to you at that," he said finally. "It's a neat piece of work."

"Thanks," Jeff said dryly.

Dexter poked an inquisitive finger at the needle, but Jeff caught his wrist before he could touch it.

"What's the matter?" Dexter demanded. "Do you think I'm a saboteur?"

"No," Jeff said, "but that needle is charged with almost five thousand volts of electricity."

Dexter dropped his hand back to his side with an almost frightened gesture.

"Hell of a thing to leave exposed," he said.

"I had to," Jeff said patiently. "When it goes onto a space ship, naturally it will be insulated or covered with glass. But I've had so many checks and alterations to make that I didn't bother about it now."

"How do you work on it if it's charged?" Dexter asked.

"I use an insulated screwdriver to remove it," Jeff said.

He was silently wondering what was behind Dexter's questioning. Dexter had never displayed any interest in his work; in fact, he had been almost con-

temptuous of the labor Jeff had put into it. Now his sudden interest seemed suspicious.

"I see," Dexter said.

He yawned and glanced at his watch.

"I think I'll grab a nap," he said. "Where's Ann?"

"She's fixing lunch," Jeff said. He glanced up at Dexter and added, "Why?"

"Just wondering," Dexter said. He grinned at Jeff and sauntered out.

JEFF sat before the bench for several moments after he'd gone, a worried frown on his face. He knew Dexter's type pretty well, and it was a type he didn't care for. In his years here he had carefully avoided trouble with the man, but he felt now that Dexter had something on his mind. His questions about the *altoscope* might indicate just a normal curiosity, but . . .

Jeff shrugged and tried to concentrate on his work. The designs and specifications for the *altoscope* were locked securely in the vault and he was suddenly glad that he had taken that precaution.

He worked, then, until Ann came in to tell him lunch was ready.

Dexter didn't show up for lunch but when they were finishing he appeared in the doorway with a paper in his hand. He was grinning sardonically.

"Sorry to interrupt your little chat," he said, "but this flash just came through from Earth."

"What is it?" Ann asked.

"Seems a squadron of Martian ships are passing this way today. The Chief wants you to go up on reconnaissance, get their number and description."

"Where were they sighted from?" Jeff asked.

"The belt asteroid group saw them go by at 2369 on a Northwest course," Dexter said.

Jeff frowned and looked at his watch. He made a quick mental calculation. The Martian ships would be passing overhead in a few minutes.

"Are you sure of the time?" he asked Dexter.

Dexter reddened slightly.

"You can call back and check my figures, if you like," he said stiffly.

"I was just asking," Jeff said. "Did the chief ask for me particularly?"

"If you think I'm lying," Dexter said with sudden anger, "why don't you say so? I'm giving you the dope as I got it. The chief evidently doesn't trust me anymore for a routine assignment. Well, he can go to hell if he doesn't like my work. And that goes for you too."

"No one has said anything about your work," Jeff said quietly. "You're doing all the talking, Dexter." He stood up and tossed his napkin onto the table. "Is the ship ready?"

"Yes," Dexter said. "She's all set."

"I'll have to hurry, then," Dexter said. He bent quickly and kissed Ann. "I'll be back in a hour or so."

When he straightened he saw that Dexter was staring at him with hard cold eyes; but he turned and walked from the room before Jeff could say anything to him.

Ann said, "Do you have to go, Jeff? I've got a funny feeling—call it a woman's intuition — that something might happen to you. Why don't you tell Dexter to go?"

"Because it's my job," Dexter said. He smiled down at his wife. "And I wouldn't worry about your premonitions. As the wife of a scientist, you should be ashamed of such ideas."

"I don't care," Ann said. "My hunches have a way of turning out right."

Jeff kissed her again and mussed her hair with his hand.

"I'll be back before you know it," he said.

OUTSIDE, the mechanic had readied the single-seater for an immediate blast-off.

"She's ready to go, Mr. Moran," he said, smiling.

"Thanks," Jeff said.

He ascended the mooring tower and climbed into the small sleek ship. He checked the controls carefully but quickly and then signaled to the ground for power.

The noise of the compressing motors hummed in his ears for an instant and the ship was hurled from the tower with a hissing roar.

Jeff braced himself as the ship cleaved through the thin atmosphere and blasted out out into the void. He climbed quickly, gaining altitude and then he started a slow wide circle, watching the fore and rear visi-screens for the first sight of Martian ships.

They should be coming into sight any second. He wondered fleetingly if there was any significance behind their flight. Relations between Earth and Mars were ostensibly cordial, but any unusual operations in the void were carefully checked by both Powers.

Maybe things were heading for a flare-up. Jeff had a certain satisfaction in the thought that if trouble did break his *altoscope* would be an important addition to the fighting forces of Earth.

He sat up in his seat as a single ship appeared in fore screen but it turned out to be a lumbering Venusian freighter. It passed him on his port side, a couple of thousand miles away. He acknowledged its signal automatically and then settled back to wait. But his face was creased with a worried frown. Was it possible that he had missed the Martian ships?

They were overdue by now and still the void was completely empty. Finally, after another ten minutes, he signaled the asteroid belt. It took him another five minutes to get in touch with their operator.

"Hello," he said, when he got a go-ahead, "this is Jeff Moran from Venus, station 9. Am I coming through?"

"Getting you fine, but a little interference," the operator said. "Where the hell are you?"

"About twenty thousand miles out," Jeff answered.

"Well, no wonder!" The operator's voice in his ears sounded surprised. "What can I do for you?"

"I want a check on the time you sighted the Martian flight," Jeff said.

There was a pause and then the operator said, "You're on a wild goose chase, Moran. We haven't sighted any Martian squadrons for the last three weeks."

"What!" Jeff exclaimed. His frown deepened. "Are you sure of that? We got a report from the chief that a Martian flight passed your base heading this way at 2369."

"Something's screwy, then," the operator said. "I've been on here all day and I haven't heard a word about it. Why don't you check with the chief?"

"Okay, I will," Jeff said.

HE CUT the circuit and signaled Headquarters. Colonel Walker, chief of the meteorology staff on Venus, answered.

Jeff wasted no time.

"Colonel," he snapped, "did you send a message to base 9 about a half hour ago concerning a group of Martian ships?"

"Who's talking?" Colonel Walker asked irritably.

"This is Moran, Jeff Moran, of 9."

"Oh. No, I sent no message to you today. What was that about Martian ships?"

Jeff didn't bother to answer. He broke the connection and sat motionless for an instant, his brain spinning frantically. Dexter had lied to him. But why?

There was only one answer and it sent a wave of fear through him.

Not for himself. For Ann.

If Dexter was planning to get him out of the way it could only be for one reason. He intended to make his own escape in the emergency ship at the base. And Jeff knew that Dexter wasn't planning to leave alone.

With all the strength in his arms he swung the ship back toward the base in a steep dive. But suddenly he felt a heavy constriction about his lungs, and then he was fighting desperately for breath.

He glanced at the oxygen meter and saw that its needle was pointing squarely at zero.

He was still minutes from the base and his air supply was gone. Already he could feel his legs growing numb and before his eyes there was a flickering maze of blackness.

Recklessly he plunged the ship toward the base. He was off the directional beam that would lead him to the tower, but he didn't have the time to reset his course.

He knew that he had, at best, about a minute left. And he had to get to the ground within that time. His legs ached with a dull steady pain and his hands on the controls were sluggish. His mouth opened and closed frantically as he fought for air.

Dimly he heard the whine of friction the ship made as it sliced into the atmosphere of the planet. He was flashing down at full speed for a head-on crash.

With his last atom of strength he groped for the repulsion rocket switch. The ground raced toward him on the fore visi-screen at a speed his eyes couldn't register.

He snapped the switch shut and his head snapped forward as the repulsion rockets suddenly roared into life, checking the hurtling speed of the ship. His safety belt almost cut through his body as he was flung forward with the tremendous velocity of the ship.

Twenty feet from the ground the ship came to a dead stop—then it dropped to the hard rocky earth with a jarring crash.

Jeff unbuckled his safety strap and staggered to the door. For a moment he feared the buckling of the frame had hopelessly jammed the hatch, trapping him in the ship. But it was only his own weakness. His fingers clawed desperately at the handle and finally it swung open.

A reviving draft of air blew into his face as he stumbled out of the ship. He sucked air gratefully into his laboring lungs and his head began to clear.

He was about a hundred yards from the base laboratory. With a prayer on his lips he began to run. . . .

THE front door of the small building was open and the living room was empty. He crossed the floor with rapid strides and flung open the laboratory door.

Ann was struggling in Dexter's arms, her face a mask of loathing and terror. She saw Jeff as he stumbled into the room.

"Jeff!" she cried.

Dexter's back was to Jeff, but he wheeled at Ann's cry and whipped a ray gun from his belt. He was wearing a rubber space suit and there was a heavy valise on the floor beside him.

"Don't move!" he panted, glaring at

Jeff. "You got back here but it won't do you any good. I'm leaving here, you understand? And I'm taking your wife and the plans for the *altoscope* with me. But you're not coming! You're going to stay right here with a dozen holes in your body to keep you company."

Jeff watched him as he spoke and he saw the insanity in the man's eyes. Dexter was not bluffing. He meant just what he said.

"You thought you were *so* smart," Dexter said with a gloating leer, "but I'm holding the high cards now. You should have died out there in space and saved me the trouble of shooting you."

"You've gone to a lot of trouble to kill me," Jeff said quietly. "If I hadn't called and checked on your phony story about the Martian ships, I wouldn't have had time to get back here to the base." He glanced casually about the laboratory and then walked deliberately to the bench that held the *altoscope*. Every foot of the way he expected a searing bolt from the gun in Dexter's hand, but it didn't come.

"Don't make another move," Dexter cried, his face working. "I'm not just talking."

"Yes you are," Jeff said coolly. "If you're going to shoot me, go ahead."

A wild, thousand-to-one possibility had occurred to him, but he had to stall long enough to put it into action.

"I intend to go on working," he said with his back to Dexter. "If you want to shoot me that's your business."

He pulled a pair of rubber gloves onto his hands and picked up a long coil of wire from the bench. Quickly he fastened the wire to the *altoscope* needle and then picked up a screwdriver.

"I don't know whether you intend to shoot me or not," he said quietly. His back hid the screwdriver from Dexter's eyes as he quickly tied the wire to its steel tip. "But if you're going to I wish you'd get it over with."

"Turn around!" Dexter snarled. "I want to see your face when I blow a hole in your belly."

"Jeff!" Ann screamed. "He's going to shoot!"

"Then let him," Jeff said.

He turned slowly, holding the screwdriver in his hand. Dexter was standing about four feet from Ann, his finger tightening on the trigger of the gun.

"All right," Dexter suddenly screamed, "you're begging for it!"

HE RAISED the gun slightly and at that instant Jeff flung himself to one side and hurled the screwdriver at Dexter's face.

The blast from the gun caught Jeff in the shoulder and he fell to the floor, teeth clenched in pain; but the screwdriver struck Dexter in the face.

A blinding flash lighted the room and Dexter's scream was that of a soul in hell. His eyes were glazed in death as he sprawled to the floor.

Jeff crawled to one knee and stared at his limp body with grim eyes. The screwdriver he had thrown had been connected to the electrically charged *altoscope* needle with the coils of wire. It had been charged with over five thousand volts of electricity and Dexter's space suit had grounded him perfectly.

Ann was at Jeff's side, sobbing.

He put his good arm about her.

"It's all over," he whispered. "He got just what he deserved, don't worry."

"I'm not thinking of him," Ann said tearfully. "But you're hurt."

"I'll be all right," Jeff said.

He forced a weak grin to his lips.

"And I've got a hunch we'll be on our way back to Earth before many more hours."

Ann smiled at him through her tears. "But you don't believe in hunches."

"From now on I will," Jeff said.

« « SCIENTIFIC ODDITIES » »

By LYNN STANDISH

Science uncovers more of these "true" oddities every day!

RADIO WAVES HARMFUL TO SEEDLINGS

FOR many years it was believed that radio waves had a stimulating and beneficial effect on plant growth. However, Drs. J. van Overbeek, Brantley, and Potapenko have proved in their experiments conducted at the California Institute of Technology that radio waves are harmful to plants.

Seedlings of corn that had been germinated in wet sand were subjected to strong doses of 2½-meter radio waves for periods of from twenty to thirty seconds before being re-planted. This treatment produced a very noticeable stunting of stem growth. If the seedlings were exposed for periods of over a minute before re-planting the tops of the plants were killed. Dr. van Overbeek had shown in previous experiments that heating the seedlings would also produce a stunting effect and he determined that this was a result of the destruction of the auxin, the growth-promoting substance in the seedlings.

From these two groups of experiments, the scientists concluded that it was the internal heating produced by the short radio waves that caused the damage to the plant tissues. That this conclusion is correct was proved when an outside application of a growth-promoting substance had the same restoring effect on plants that had been either heated or rayed.

* * *

IODINE CURE FOR GOITER

THE discovery of iodine and its subsequent use as a cure for goiter was all brought about by war and the story bears out the statement that truth is often stranger than fiction.

During the Napoleonic Wars, the armies of France were continually clamoring for a larger and then still larger output of gunpowder. One French manufacturer of saltpeter, in order to increase his output, made a radical change in his manufacturing process. Instead of using wood ashes, he used a water extract of burnt seaweed. Although his new process was entirely satisfactory, he noticed that erosion was taking place on his copper vats and he found that the eroding agent was the water extract used in his new process. Because of the color of its vapor, he called the substance iodine. It was in 1819, six years after its christening, that iodine was found to exist in great quantities in the ash of the common sponge.

Coindet, a physician of Geneva, was the man to see in this newly discovered element the effective agent of the ancient cure for goiter. To test his theory, he began to administer iodine to his goiter patients and in 1819 he reported that a dosage of 1.5 to 3 grains of iodine daily would cause goiters to disappear in from six to ten weeks even when they were of large size and long standing. He added that a noticeable improvement was noted within eight to ten days after the treatment was started.

With Coindet's discovery made public, the iodine treatment became "the thing" for everyone. To protect themselves from goiter, the people began to wear small bottles of iodine about their necks. Although Coindet and other able physicians warned both the medical profession and the public that iodine was poisonous and that an excessive dosage could result in death, this warning had no effect on either the public or many of the doctors. Many persons died as a result and this gave the iodine treatment for goiter a "black-eye" which it did not deserve. It was until 1895, when it was shown that the thyroid gland was rich in iodine, that the treatment for goiter was again used to correct the iodine deficiency in the glands.

* * *

SIMPLE TEST PICKS RIGHT MAN FOR JOB

ONE of the major problems of the army today is the task of placing hundreds of thousands of recruits into that particular branch of the service for which they are best suited. This problem has also been a very important one in industry even prior to the war. It is therefore with great interest that a report was received from Dr. Z. Protrowski and Miss B. Candee of the National Youth Administration that men who could succeed in the tank and other highly mechanized units of the army and who would be able to carry the burdens of a modern war, can be chosen by means of an inkblot test now used to determine a person's creative imagination.

The test requires that the person study a selected group of black and colored inkblots and then tell just what kind of a picture or object the shapes bring to his mind. This simple process can give a psychologist clues to a person's past experience, interests, and personality which cannot be brought out in a simple interview.

Dr. Protrowski and Miss Candee used a test group of 70 men and they claim in 64 of the cases they successfully picked the men who would make good among mechanics and those who would "crack" in their new life with the army.

Further claims for the success of the test were indicated by the fact that it revealed the young men who could make good in regular camp life,

but who cracked when faced with a situation of unusual military strain in six tested cases of which five were predicted correctly by this test alone.

* * *

AMERICAN INGENUITY COMES THROUGH

AMERICAN ingenuity, consistently on the lookout for new methods of improving and safeguarding our national security, has brought forth another weapon which is all-important to the successful prosecution of the war. This weapon does not fire shells or bullets, but, nonetheless, is just as important if not more so. This new weapon, the culmination of years of scientific research, is the use of a particular type of rayon cord in the manufacture of tires for American bombers and army trucks. The significant thing to note, however, is that this material not only supplements our dwindling supply of rubber; it can be produced from resources right in this country. Thus this rubber substitutes helps to overcome the military handicap imposed by the rubber shortage. This material is used very extensively in the production of tires for many of the modern military vehicles.

This rayon product, in the manufacturing process, is placed under the valuable outer covering of rubber. Thus this product must and does absorb a terrific amount of punishment which it undergoes when, for instance, a heavy bomber lands at a high rate of speed. When one realizes how much force action is involved in the landing of tons of metal at high speeds he commences to realize the significance of this new material. Furthermore, the modern army car is driven over rough country which imposes terrific hardships on the tires. But tires consisting mainly of this rayon material have proven themselves worthy and reliable.

Another advantage of the rayon cord is that heat does not cause it to lose its durability or strength. Thus the tire is more resistent to blow-outs when it is heated by its being used for a long period of time without let-up. This latter advantage is of the utmost importance because in the modern war, army cars are driven at amazing speeds throughout hot deserts and over rough land. Also, since tires made of this rayon cord are lighter than the ordinary tire, the saving in weight can be utilized to increase the amount of bombs carried by the plane equipped with these tires. Or this decrease in weight can be used to increase the bombing range of the planes. This benefit, of course, is of prime significance in the winning of the war.

* * *

A "PHONY PHONE"

MOST people do not realize that when a horse is seen trotting down the street and the sound of his hoofs is heard at the same time, the association between the sound of the hoofs and the direction of the sound is identified, almost automatically by experience in the mind. For if a sound is received more loudly in one ear than the other, the individual "senses" that the sound is coming from that direction.

An interesting experiment has been made in which sound entering the two ears were interchanged. This was effected by an instrument called a *pseudophone*, consisting of tubes fitted into the two ears which led over the head to a trumpet (or receiving horn) just above the opposite ear. As a result, each ear received the sound which would have ordinarily affected the other ear.

For the first few days the wearer of the pseudophone lived in utter confusion! An automobile would be seen coming down the street and the sound of its horn and of its motor would come from the opposite direction. A person coming through a door would be heard entering from the opposite side of the room.

After a few days, with the help of cues from the visual field, the subject learned to localize sounds fairly well again. This was a new learning process. Just as the restored cripple has to learn how to walk again, so did our subject have to "learn how to hear again." When the pseudophone was removed, normal hearing was immediately returned.

* * *

POST-MORTEM MILKING

WHEN does a cow manufacture her milk? Does she manufacture continuously while being milked? Or is it manufactured long before and stored? Or is it manufactured just before milking time? Many people have wondered about these questions.

Most farmers, teachers, and professional men engaged in the field of dairy cattle work are said to believe that the udder of a cow will hold only about half a pint of milk to the quarter and that the liquid is manufactured just as the cow gives it down at milking time.

The question was approached by the United States Department of Agriculture. And it was proved that most of the milk is *not* manufactured during the few minutes required for the milking process.

The proof of this conclusion was obtained by a novel experiment in post-mortem milking. Two cows were killed, their udders immediately removed and mounted on a framework, and then milked. One of these cows had been giving an average of about twelve pounds at each milking. It was found that a total of ten and twenty-seven one-hundredths pounds of milk was drawn from this cow's udder after it was severed from the body. Thus eighty-five per cent of her milk had been stored in her udder before she was slaughtered.

The only answer to any scientific question is found by the application of scientific method—carefully planned experimental work. Even in such a down-to-earth activity as milking "Bossy", science is the master.

Scientific

THE APACHE DEVIL DANCE IS IDENTIFIED BY THE TRIDENTS OF LIGHTED TORCHES, AND THE SWORD AND SNAKE-LANCE BORNE IN THE HANDS; ALSO THE PARTICIPANTS ARE MASKED AND WEAR A MOUTH-VEIL.

THERE IS AN AMAZING SIMILARITY BETWEEN THE TAOS PUEBLOS AND THE SAHARAS. ARE THESE VEILED NATIVES FROM THE SAME BEGINNING AS THE AFRICAN TUARAKS?

THE ZAPOTECS BUILT THEIR CITIES UPON ISLANDS IN THE LAKES BECAUSE THAT IS WHERE SI-PA-PU GAVE BIRTH TO THE RACES OF MANKIND.

THE AMERICAN DRAGON

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

There is much mystery behind the dragon legends of the American Indian. What is the mysterious connection with the other continental aborigines?

STANDING on the edge of the Taos Pueblo, the world-traveler who knows his Sahara, receives the surprise of his life. Tall, slim, masculine figures slip by entirely wrapped in an all-enveloping white blanket which only allows dark slits of eyes to show. Is this the United States? Or is that ghostly figure now passing one of those cruel and mysteriously "veiled ones" of the Sahara—the Tuaraks? What strange freak has caused such vastly removed peoples to adopt the same costume? Or is it a freak chance? The average citizen will shrug his shoulders and go on. The archaeologist starts asking questions.

The Sahara and the American Desert have one very obvious trait in common. Questions are not desirable. Yet some of us have so much of that insatiable curiosity of the "elephant's child" in our makeup that we do not know when to stop. And sometimes we find out some very fascinating ethnological answers. This is true when we can offer interesting information in return for that which we seek. In such a case, the best informant is the conservative of all the conservatives—the "medicine man" himself. The trick is to get him interested. It *can* be done.

There are means of accomplishing this, as well as ways in which it cannot be done. One cannot accomplish anything in a hurry with an Indian. He lives in a more quiet world. He does not know the meaning of the word which is so liberally used by us. His very conversation is interspersed with long pauses which would be actually embarrassing to a skilled conversationalist of the white race.

In talking to an Indian of his lore, as do not try to hurry is rule number one, so seriousness is rule number two. To many a fool has tried to win the story of the past in a week or a month, and having received an honest answer, such as the legend of the Snake-Eagle War, has turned his scornful laughter upon the surprised and offended narrator. The Indian youth must go through trials and ordeals to obtain this ancient wisdom in order to prove his worthiness to receive. Why should they hand it out to the white man who only turns upon it his ridicule? This is the Indian's point of view.

The third rule to remember, is that the tribal lore is the property of the entire tribe. According to ancient law, should one member give it away without the consent of the others, his eyes, tongue or life should be forfeited. Thus the veils of secrecy which keep the curious white man from the inner meanings of the symbols are not easily pierced.

(In order to protect the life of my informant, in the following, the character is fictionized, but the names given are facts, as are the legends. The conclusion reached is that toward which science must inevitably come, with further study and coordination of what information is now to be found within ethnological studies made by the Smithsonian upon the Pueblos, and Pueblo religion within the last two decades.)

The present writer had just seen the Apache Devil Dance for the first time. (The Devil Dance is the one in which tridents of lighted torches, the central prong being four together, are borne upon the head while a sword and snake-lance are carried in the hands. In this dance the participants are not only masked but a mouth-veil is also worn. The number four, so sacred to the Snake Totem is more than evident.) The trident and the mouth-veil! The combination was also to be found in "The Dance of the Veiled One" sometimes given by San Domingo Pueblo, only in the latter, the veil is worn so that nothing of the face shows but the eyes. Another difference was that the trident carried was the rainbow. This fact had marked the "Veiled One" as Itzamna who is so closely connected with the rainbow in Maya religion. Or did it? One can never be certain.

AT ONCE, I sought out a certain Indian. I shall call him "The Sage" because of his extensive knowledge—of which I am sure I have but scratched only a trifle below the veneer. He was an old man with iron-grey hair, but the tiger-gleam was in his eyes, and his tread was cat-like, with much hidden strength.

"This figure, is he a devil to the Apaches?" I asked bluntly with unwise enthusiasm.

"I do not know. I am not an Apache."

Of course, I knew then that the question was unwisely worded as well. My friend was a Keresian, a tongue which is considered to be almost without affinities.

"But," I persisted, "the figure is so similar to that of the 'Veiled One,' who is a Keresian God."

"You are right."

"Could you find it possible to tell me the name of the 'Veiled One'?" I persisted.

"Indians do not believe in speaking sacred names. They think that if you speak the name, then the power of the name fades, and when you need the power, it is not there."

"Then let me tell you about this god and the various names he has carried. To the Egyptians of many milleniums ago, he was Ammon Ra. To the Greeks, he was Pan, but he had already become by this time a minor god for he belonged to a far more ancient world than Periclean Greece. To the Norse, he was the 'Two-horned' and to the Mediterranean world he had many of the characteristics later given to Baal and Ishtar—such as his continual connections with child-sacrifice, and that he was considered 'fire-breathing,' but lived in water. In his best aspects, he was pictured as a mother holding her infant son in her arms, but by the nations who were trying to represent him as their 'spirit of evil'—he was portrayed as a dragon—usually two—mother and son."

"A dragon?"

"One of those." I explained, tossing a pebble after a lizard who was scuttling away through the sage and sand, "Only much larger."

He nodded thoughtfully. We had now reached the open desert where there were no eavesdroppers.

"The Pueblos of your people are known as the Keres Nation. What does the name mean?"

"It has no meaning."

"That reminds me of a certain ancient people known as the Karians who were a sea-peoples, of mysterious origin, and once over-ran much of the Mediterranean world. Their name had no meaning either. But the letter 'K' stood for 'people' and 'A-R.' stood for 'Ammon-R'."

"Tell me something of the Indian tribes who hold sacred this great reptile, or worship a 'Veiled One'." he asked.

"To some extent all of them do respect the reptiles, especially the snakes, and even to frogs. But there are some who. . . . You ask me to tell you of the tribes who belong to the Totem. Very well. Point to the direction where they live."

Without a moment's hesitation he pointed to the south.

"Why do you point south?"

"Because we have a tradition that we were once a very great nation. We had a land of shining-roofs. We had cities with beautiful temples where the 'Veiled One' ruled. Then came a devastating conqueror from the south who drove us before him like tumble-weed before the wind. Tell me of the cities to the south."

"FIRST, there are the Zapotecs. They have a calendar midway between the Maya and the Aztec, all three of which are sun-calendar. Possibly this means that the Zapotec is the stem from which the others branched. They had cities usually built near water or lakes, or upon islands. Their main god was a 'Veiled Majesty.' Their totem the Great Lizard. . . .

"They built their cities upon islands in lakes because that is where Si-pa-pu gave birth to the tribes of men. That is why water is sacred, because water is the communication to this island-homeland which was again swallowed up by water, long, long ago."

"What direction was this water-homeland?"

"Why to the south, and then toward the direction of the rising sun. And Si-pa pu was the great Earth-goddess, who is sometimes painted with the symbol of the Great-Reptile. But you did not finish your story about the peoples of the south."

"Yes, of course. We still have the very interesting Mayas. Their liberaries were burned by some Spanish fanatics, but this caused such a storm of protest from the scholars of the day, that the Spanish monarch sent out inquiries as to their history. Maya sages replied, and thus we have a sketchy history of this much-conquered people.

"It seems that the Chanules or People-of-the-Snake were the first to build at Yucatan. They declared that the Serpent crawled out of the Sun-rise-sea, which probably means that they were sea peoples. Then early in the story, came the Itzaes from the South. They were led by Itzamna, or as some of the Maya tribes in the jungles of Central America call him Zamna, Itiwana, or Tiama (The name has a curious way of reminding one of the Mediterranean Dragon—Tiamat, the Tiamat of Ancient Su-Mer.) There seems to be some confusion about this figure. He is sometimes spoken of as a god and again as a man. Possibly, by the time the Itzaes had reached Yucatan, he had already been long deified. Like the similar figure of Votan, among the Guatemala Indians and certain Mexican tribes, Itzamna is spoken of as a white man who brought a fleet of ships from across the Sun-rise Sea from his lost homeland. He is the Lord-of-Learning, the inventor of writing and of the calendar. Indeed he has many of the characteristics of Osiris in Egypt. Upon one fact he differs. As both Votan and Osiris are of the Snake Totem, Itzamna is of the Great Dragon. . . ."

"Tell me of these people—the Ishtzas."

He stopped and sat upon a rock where he could face me. I squatted upon a smaller stone at his feet.

"The Itzaes came from the south, and were fleeing before conquerors. They settled among the peoples of the Serpent Totem, the Chanules or Ah-Canule. They built Chi-chen-Itza, which is the

Athens of the Americas for beauty. Then after a golden age of a number of centuries, a devastating army came from the south. They were the Tutul-Xius, which is pronounced, we are told by the Indians as Too-tool-Shioux (or Shu). These people too, declared that they were once very great and had vast cities but were driven out by a conquering army and had spent many generations in the woods and the mountains and jungles, living upon the strength of their good bows. They drove out some of the Itzaes and conquered the rest, and again the empire began to rise, but before long it was conquered by the Toltec or Quiche army coming down from the north. These people, known to us as the Mayas, tried to raise another civilization but the Aztecs, or their fore-runners, the Nicaraoes (from whence we derive Nicaragua) were beginning to over-run the country in their drive down from the north. At this point the Spanish stepped in."

"Was the 'Veiled Majesty' worshipped by the Ishtzas?"

"I do not know. Still it seems probable. Even today, the Mayas always veil their nose and mouth at night when they must step out into the night air. Undoubtedly that has some forgotten ritualistic significance."

"All you have told me points to the homeland of these peoples as to the south—still south. If they built cities there, where are the ruins?"

"That is the rub. Both the Itzaes and the Tutul-Xius say they were driven out from a southern empire. Yet today, we know only of that 'south,' as the most impenetrable jungle on earth (Brazil).

"But this land from which Zamanya came—this land out in the Sun-rise Sea?"

"There is no such island today—east of South America. Perhaps, as you suggested, it was swallowed again by the water."

WE SAT through one of the long silences which characterize Indian conversations. Then slowly he rose. He threw back his head and looked around at the colorful desert.

"My people have been in this land for many generations. Perhaps it is not well that they take so much knowledge with them into the shadows. Therefore, I have decided to answer your questions about the dance of the 'Veiled One,' and about the real name of my people. The name of the 'Veiled One' you yourself told me was Zamna. In one dialect we call him 'Tamanya' and in another, 'Zamda'!"

As the significance of this fell across my face, he smiled.

"Yes, what you are thinking is true. The real name for my nation is not Keres. That is a name for the white man to call us by.

There is another name—a secret name. That is the one for which you have been . . . let us say . . . fishing? Perhaps it is not so wise, after all, to keep such things secret. Therefore, I have made up my mind to tell you. As every Keresian knows, we are the 'K'at Ishtza' which translated into English simply means: 'The People of the Ishtza'."

THE END

I have received a number of requests for more information concerning the books which I give as references. Many of them are almost unobtainable, they have been so long out of print. I would suggest that if anyone is interested, they first try to read the volume from the "Reserve" shelf of the Public Library in the nearest city. If the book is not to be had there, the librarian is the person who can give the most detailed information as to how and where, in any particular city, to go about obtaining the volume.—Author.

A SCIENTIFIC BROTHER-SISTER ACT

WHAT would happen if an infant ape were reared with the same opportunity as the human infant? Two scientists, Mr. and Mrs. W. N. Kellogg, sought the answer to this interesting question in the most direct way. They reared a female chimpanzee along with their own son for nine months!

When "Gua", the chimpanzee, was adopted, she was seven and a half months old; their son, Donald was ten months old. Both were treated with the same gentle care. The two "children" ate, slept, and played together. Gua, stronger and physically more mature than Donald, was more adept at activities such as climbing and acrobatics. She was more rapid in movements and seemed to learn a great many things easily. Of most interest is Gua's learning of the so-called humanizing behavior. She quickly learned to eat with a spoon, to drink liquids out of a glass, to open doors, and to do these things better than did Donald, and showed in general, more cooperation and obedience.

But in one important phase of development, Gua lagged behind. The ape learned to understand a large number of words and phrases, it seemed, but she never learned to speak. Donald, of course, learned language in the normal course of development. At the age of one year, he was able to say da-da, ma-ma, Gya (for Gua), and din-din for dinner. Later he uttered ba (for boo), da (for down), and bow-wow (for dog). He also became very skillful in his imitation of sounds made by the chimpanzee. These were classified as the bark, the food bark, the screech or scream, and the "oo-oo" cry.

Thus, by virtue of the powerful tool—language—Donald is destined for far greater things than is Gua. Donald and his fellow humans alone can speak, read, write, worship supernatural beings, build skyscrapers, and predict the position of the stars a thousand years from now.

Such is the power of language!

The Science of Food

FEW indeed are the humans who realize the great debt owed by them to the simple little plants which are seen almost everywhere. The first to reach the land were the plants and their presence permitted animals to come on land and establish themselves there. The foods of the living consist of three major types with additional substances to be added in small quantities. The three major types of foods are proteins, carbohydrates and fats.

Fats are synthesized from carbohydrates, so they need not be considered at length here. The fats are found in quantity on and in any well fed animal. And since they are in balance with carbohydrates, an animal which has plenty of carbohydrates is almost certain to have a large amount of fat.

It is quite a different matter with the carbohydrates, for they must be synthesized out of carbon dioxide and oxygen. By a system, whose chemistry has been entirely worked out by biochemists, the plants which are green and have green leaves, trees for instance, can take these two gases and unite them into a simple carbohydrate or sugar as we commonly call them, in the presence of a wonderful substance, the green coloring matter. Water enters into this picture in the form of vapor, playing an important role.

These sugars are used by the plants, but at certain times of the year, especially when the sun is strong, the plants store up quite a bit of this sugar and they convert it into starch. The plant most famous for this type of action is the potato. These start out just like other plants but during the summer they make so much carbohydrate that they must store large quantities in the form of tubers.

The proteins are the class of food which deserves most attention. Essentially we are what our proteins make us. The proteins are the determining factors in the type of animal, the type of blood, and many other fine details of structure and function. Proteins are built up from groups of amino acids. These acids are ammonia compounds, or essentially organic compounds with nitrogen in them. It is beyond the ability of animals to build up their own proteins. They must get them from other animals, or from plants. Since only carnivorous animals eat other animals, the herbivorous animals have the responsibility of getting the simple proteins from the plants and breaking them down to amino acids and then building them up to substances like themselves. This is essentially what man does, but he gets his proteins from plants and animals as well. He breaks them down to their constituent substances and then rebuilds them for his own use.

Only plants have the ability to build proteins or amino acids. While there are only twenty-seven different types of amino acids, there are almost infinite types of proteins. To be mathematical for a moment, the number of proteins can be approximately found by multiplying twenty-seven by twenty-six, and this product by twenty-five and so on. This will show why it is a much simpler matter to build up our proteins from another animal's amino acids than to attempt to get proteins just like our own, which is impossible anyway.

These figures also lend credence to the claims of the vegetarians who claim to be able to get all out of plants that we can get out of animals. This is true, but it is not quite so easy to eat almost twenty different types of plants where two types of meat will suffice. It can be done nevertheless.

Our debt to plants does not end with the two major classifications of food however, since our bodies need several types of salts which they can and do provide. Through plants and plant food we get calcium, magnesium even iron, which spinach is especially noted for. Iodine too is another important substance which is removed from plant food in the process of digestion.

Moreover, plants are the only creatures which can build up the very necessary vitamins. We have heard much about vitamins recently, and many drug companies have shown in large advertisements just how important the vitamins are. Scientists have known just how terrible lack of them could be for quite some time now.

We have and shall always have a debt of gratitude toward the plants not only for the beginning of animal life on land, but also for the continued sustenance of it.

COMING IN THE MARCH ISSUE

A Sensational New Interplanetary Story by

G. H. IRWIN

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DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

AN OLD CLASSIC REMEMBERED

Sirs:

I wish to thank you for the wonderful magazine you give to the public. You print many fine stories, but none that has come up to "The Green Splotches," by T. S. Stribling. It was truly a classic.

J. O. HEDGPETH,
Route 9, Box 88,
Charlotte, N. C.

You might be interested to know that "The Green Splotches" was published recently in a pocket-book selection of classics, as was Wallace West's "The Last Man," both reprinted from AMAZING STORIES.—ED.

STREET OF BROKEN PROMISES

Sirs:

How long will it be before AMAZING starts fulfilling all the promises it's made in the last year? I believe it was about a year ago, when you printed that contest short, "The Perfect Trap," that you promised to print the winning solution. Have you already printed the solution, or am I just the first one to ask about it?

Last February, when you printed "Skeleton Men of Jupiter," you said this was the first of a new Burroughs series. Well? And how about those other Hawk Carse stories you promised us last year? And that sequel to "Vengeance of Martin Brand"? It's been six months since you printed "The New Adam," but then you promised more reprints immediately.

Speaking of reprints, I suggest Merritt's "Moon Pool" and "People of the Pit." Also "Sons of the Deluge," "Battering Rams of Space," any E. E. Smith stories available, and even that stinking "Black World." (That's right -you wrote it, didn't you?)

Going back again to the subject of broken promises, where-oh-where is "Moon of Double Trouble"? Or was that just a hoax? And that sequel to "Warrior of the Dawn" had better be forthcoming if you don't want your name to be mud.

DARREL BURKHARDT,
Long Lake, Minn.

We'll try to answer all of your questions. 1. The editors didn't publish the winning solution because none worthy of publication was received. 2. Edgar Rice Burroughs is now in Africa on war duty. He is doing no fiction. But when he returns, his interrupted series will continue. 3. The same with Hawk Carse. Anthony Gilmore is too busy inventing war weapons (or some such thing) to write more at the present time. 4. Irwin is at work on the sequel to Martin Brand, which he says will be long and good. 5. Because of the paper shortage, we reverted to publishing only original material, in order to be entirely fair to our writers. No more reprints for the duration. 6. Yes, we wrote "Black World," possibly the only thing we ever did that the fans applauded heartily. It makes us itch to write another story. Maybe we will, if the fans would like it? As for "Moon of Double Trouble" —written, but still unscheduled. Howard Browne is working on a new Tharn.—ED.

MORE QUESTIONS

Sirs:

Just the other day I was reading a letter by one of your readers about a rocket trip to the moon. He brought up the question of whether the ship would need constant drive or just enough to get it beyond the earth's gravitational attraction. I don't know a lot about it, so could you explain this to me—how far from the surface of a heavenly body does the gravity have enough force to affect a passing ship (if there were such things)? Does it extend until the attraction of another body nullifies it, or does it just go out for a specified distance?

If it only reached out for a certain distance, only an initial thrust would be necessary, wouldn't it? For with no air in space to create friction, a ship could travel on inertia, theoretically.

What is the correct definition of the Heaviside Layer? I have read of it in numerous stories, but have never found out what it is. Also, if you don't mind my questions, what is a tesseract? From what I can make out, it is a fourth-dimensional cube, roughly, that is. Instead of being faced by squares, its faces are cubes. Is that anywhere near correct, or am I all wet? If the latter is true, can you enlighten me?

A. BROWN,
201 Second St.,
Red Oak, Iowa.

Theoretically, gravity attraction goes on forever from any and all bodies, decreasing as the square

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of the distance. Thus, to practical thinking, it ceases to exist at a point comparatively near the body insofar as planetary distances are concerned. However, even little Mercury has an effect on giant Jupiter many millions of miles away. An initial thrust would be fatal on a body such as Earth. It is reckoned to be necessary to have an initial velocity of 7 miles per second. If you've ridden the street car often, you know what a jolt a sudden start gives you. Magnify that to the speed computed and you get—well, bloody! In space, of course, inertia coasting is absolutely possible. Theoretically, a space ship, once in free space, would go on forever with its initial velocity.

The Heaviside Layer, discovered by wireless experiments, is thought to consist of either ionized gas or frozen hydrogen in minute particles. Its height is approximately 60 miles above the surface of the Earth. Still another such layer exists at 200 miles out, called the "Appleton" layer.

A tesseract is a hypothetical four-dimensional cube. Your definition is correct. It is obtained by beginning with a point. Move the point, you have a line. Move the line at right angles, you have a plane square. Move the plane at right angles, you have a cube. Then by carrying this theory to the next step you get a tesseract. But actually, we don't know in which direction to move a cube to move it at right angles to ALL its other dimensions.—ED.

"TRUE" FACTS

Sirs:

I was looking through a magazine yesterday and found an article in the May, 1942, issue of "Popu-

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Amazing Stories, published bi-monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for Oct. 1, 1943. State of Illinois, County of Cook, ss. Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared A. T. Pullen, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the business manager of Amazing Stories and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor and business managers are: Publisher, William B. Ziff, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; Editor, B. G. Davis, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; Managing Editor, Raymond Palmer, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; Business Manager, A. T. Pullen, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill. 2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; W. B. Ziff Co., 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; William B. Ziff, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; B. G. Davis, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; A. Ziff, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.; S. Davis, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: (If there are none, so state.) None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is ..... (This information is required from daily publications only.) A. T. Pullen, Business Manager. (Signature of business manager.)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1943.
(Seal) Mae Harris, Notary Public. (My commission expires Sept. 11, 1944.)

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lar Astronomy." I believe that it explains itself. It shows how the science fiction authors have twisted the facts to fit their stories. How can you call a story a science fiction story if it contradicts scientific facts?

I believe you are doing more harm than good when you lead your readers to believe that your stories are based on science. Most of your stories are shot through with glaring errors. It isn't impossible to write a good story and stick to the true facts. Why not have one of your authors try it. It's an insult to science to call your stories "science" fiction. I will gladly accept all criticism from the readers and you alike. It might promote an interesting but bloody discussion. Yours for true facts.

KARL BOUVIER, JR.,
433 W. 55th St.,
Los Angeles 37, Calif.

When writing of other worlds, we actually have only one fact to deal with—the existence of that other world. We don't actually know anything about it except what we can see and measure with our Earthbound instruments. And even the camera can lie. Even an immutable physical law on Earth may not hold true on another world. Thus, our authors have some license. Wouldn't a story of today's aviation be ridiculous in your definition, if it were written before the Wright brothers? Flying in heavier than air machines was certainly a "glaring error" to put into a story!—ED.

PLEASE! MR. KENNEDY!

Sirs:

After reading the September issue I was inclined to believe that AMAZING STORIES was actually climbing out of its well-worn rut (though yarns such as "The New Adam" and "Bill Caldron" *did* provide an occasional bright spot in a world of gloom). Alas! I am forced to reverse my decision. Your December issue was the sort of thing that drives innocent science-fiction fans to scanning the telephone directory in search of literature.

"Jenny—The Flying Ford" is beyond any doubt the most moth-eaten hunk of hack I have yet laid eyes on. Corny in every way, it raised a stench comparable only to the odor of Adolf the Paperhanger. Take warning, O almighty editor! Any more like this and I shall sic the evil eye upon you. Beware!

Out of respect for the authors' reputations, I'll skip the remainder of the stories (?) in the mag. Sufficient to say that Repp took an enormous slip, McKenzie likewise, and Yerxa not at all since he's plenty horrible anyway.

Cheer up! "Empire of Jegga" was a bell-ringer. Ninety-thousand-worders are a rarity in any STFantasy magazine. Mr. Reed's tale (while noth-

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ing to declare a holiday over) struck me as being pleasantly written and cleverly developed. More compliments: Hadden's excellent illustrating provided exactly the right atmosphere for the novel. More of his work! He looks like a nominee for the elite top-shelf bunch of artists, namely Finlay, Bok and Paul.

While we're on the subject, orchids to Settles for his consistently fine back cover paintings. One loud raspberry to the creature responsible for the brutal mangling of page 157. Better to leave it blank than to print anything so ghastly.

On-bended-knee department: *Please,* I beg of you, make the Discussions page bigger. Two or three hundred pages of letters would be nice, but I'll settle for half a dozen.

JOE KENNEDY,
84 Baker Ave.,
Dover, N. J.

Aw come on, Joe! You'd throw out a whole basket of fruit because ten percent was no good? You admit 90% (90,000 words) of this issue is a "bell-ringer." As a matter of fact, you like a good deal more of our contents than the average reader, who runs about 50% (because individual preference runs that way). As for our discussions department, several thousand letters have convinced us. Since we expanded it a bit, we've been literally buried beneath enthusiastic letters. Many readers tell us the Ford story was a delightful piece.—ED.

CONCERNING "PLEASURE"

Sirs:

The letter of Raymond Washington in the last issue of AMAZING STORIES was one of the best you have yet published and your answer the usual one when asked by somebody why your magazine isn't better. I haven't it near me now (I shouldn't wonder; I will have to admit that I don't buy your magazine, and only read it on the newsstand as much as possible) but I understand that he said that fans are generally intelligent and you said that you only wanted to publish stories that give pleasure.

You were both slightly off in your reasoning. Washington tried to use fans as a class when he should have pointed out the differences between the types. There are, for example, the fan who knows "great" literature, but reads fantasy for the fun of it; the fan whose soul is tied up in the stuff and who puts out wonderful mimeographed sheets of paper called Fanzines; the technically minded fan, who reads it because he is a scientist and for some perverse reason delights in it, even though he sees the science in it way up in the cloud-cuckoo-land where the authors get their ideas; the casual fan, who reads the stuff, likes it, knows the best in the field, occasionally writes a letter to the editor, but doesn't go beyond that; and last, and these are in the huge majority, those who read the stuff just the same way as they would the other pulp fields, and ask for the same kind of stuff.

You are, obviously, aiming for the last named group.

That rather leaves the others holding the bag—or your magazine, with a disappointed expression

on their faces.

But you are making a lot of money.

That brings us to your argument, namely, that you are only there to give pleasure. I pray thee, good sir, but how did you ever get the idea that the kind of stuff you put out gives the *maximum* amount of "pleasure"—whatever that is. Most fans, even in the last group, are not unintelligent, but they (the last group) do not know what they want. They read the stories you give them, and suppose they are the best they can get so they ask for more. But if they did get better type stories, they would understand and like these just as well; witness New Adam. You seemed to get enough letters—even from the last group—liking it so it would be profitable to get others like it; but no; you say: ". . . reprints as a rule don't measure up to new stories . . ."

Your appeal is juvenile, or to those with juvenile minds—which seem to make up ninety per cent of the American population—but you can help those to grow up.

It should be classed as a crime that you are not doing so.

Why have a magazine that costs a quarter a month just to give pleasure. There are plenty of other magazines in America that more people read, that do the same task and do it better.

Science-fiction and fantasy is one class of fiction that should give pleasure—but give it in a better way than it is doing now.

RAY KARDEN,
409 Twelfth Street,
Cloquet, Minnesota.

Boy, do we disagree with you, and how! Just recently Donald Wolheim, a fan, and also an editor of another science fiction magazine, selected two stories from AMAZING STORIES *for inclusion in a pocket book of science fiction classics. Thus, we do publish a few stories that appeal to one of the groups you mention. We read our fan mail, and we give the readers what they want. And we give it in the percentage their requests show. The type of fiction predominating now, is there because the predominating number of readers SPECIFICALLY asked for it. And they DIDN'T ask until they had gotten a few samples of it! Then they were loud in their demands for more. You say it is a crime we don't educate—to help readers grow up. Personally, we remember the early days of science fiction. We were one of the fans. Our associates were fans. Today we look around and find out what happened to them. We were entertained then. Now we are running the science fiction show! Every editor in the business, every top-notch writer, got his start as a fan! All began as readers, were given much pleasure through the reading of science fiction, and made it their life work. And we have as treasured possessions many letters from the best writers in the field, expressing the opinion that Ziff-Davis magazines carry their banner highest. As for education, a story that gives pleasure does more to educate than a text book. You are not holding the bag. If it were not for the last group you mention, there would*

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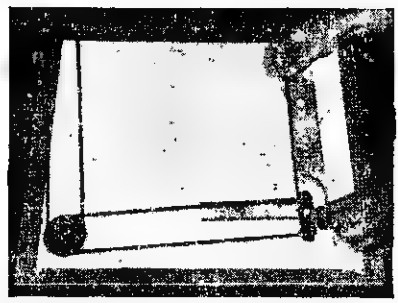

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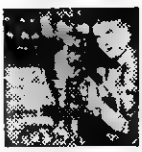

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WE THINK YOU WILL

Sirs:

I wish to start this letter by saying I never heard of AMAZING STORIES until about a month ago. You see I come from Missouri but recently moved to Calif.

One day I had nothing to do. I was sitting in the lobby of our hotel. I saw a mag laying on a table, picked it up and started reading it. When I finished it I had enjoyed it very much. Then I looked at the covers and I liked them also.

The AMAZING mag I was reading happened to be an April, 1941 (really old isn't it). Even if the book was terribly old I got lots of enjoyment out of it.

I intend to get some up-to-date AMAZING mags. If I like them (and I hope I do) I will keep on getting them.

I will write again soon and tell you if I intend to be a fan of yours.

JOSEPHINE WHITTING,
1814 Pacific Ave.,
Venice, Calif.

We'll be waiting for your letter!—ED.

LIKES AND DISLIKES

Sirs:

This is the first time I've written to your magazine and I hope that you will publish this letter, for I am curious to see what the editor note will be. I have been reading AMAZING ever since I can remember and have always liked it. Here is a list of things I like and don't like. 10 means perfect, 9 almost, and so on—

1) After an Age—10.

2) Daughter of Destiny—10.

3) Skeleton Men of Jupiter—10. Don't like St. John. Get an artist.

4) The Light that Killed—9.

5) Persian Carpet—1 minus.

6) Bring Back My Body—10.

7) Visitor to Earth—10. We should have a sequel.

8) That Worlds May Live—10.

9) Bill Cauldron Goes to the Future—10. But in the picture it shows Bill Cauldron stripped to the waist and it didn't say anything about him getting dressed. Don't you think that the people in the future would be a little shocked? Brady is superb on drawing bare torsos, biceps, etc.

10) Never Trust a Demon—8.

How about a sequel to "After an Age"?

I have noticed that swear words are used widely in stories, but you frown upon them in letters. That's too bad, for I can't say some things that I'd like to.

NELSON LANEFIELD III.
(No address.)

Glad to see you like us so well. As for the future, we don't think anybody would be shocked at seeing a man stripped to the waist! As for a sequel to "After an Age," Mr. Binder is a tough man to prevail upon these days. We're trying to get an Adam Link first. But we'll corner him some day and discover his plans for the future. A little "damning" in stories seems to be okay. But we edit all letters, and on those things we have a "formula," we'll admit. Ever notice how all our letters begin "Sirs:"? Well, actually, they don't, but your editor hates to be called a gentleman all the time!—ED.

ABOUT DISCUSSIONS

Sirs:

I haven't just finished your August issue. It wasn't swell. What I'm writing about is something very different, your readers page. It's the worst of any magazine I've ever seen (Even AMAZING STORIES). I'll give you a few of the reasons.

1. Your readers page is much too short. Besides you ought to set an amount of pages for it and publish that amount every single issue instead of printing one page one issue and 8 or 9 the next. Make up your mind.

2. It isn't terrible interesting. If you'd only let a couple of guys get into a fight. A lot of guys writer humorous letters too. Why don't you give them a crack at the readers page?

3. You've got the readers page all mixed up with advertisements or the other way around. There's plenty of other places to put the advertisements. For instance, I'm reading along about how this guy liked the last issue of F.A. and then all of a sudden I am reading about how to buy false teeth at a reduced rate. So why not put the readers pages all together without interruptions?

4. Also keep the cartoons out of the readers pages. I don't like to look at a spaceship having a race around the sun to see who can put it out first while I'm reading a letter. Keep your cartoons in the pages with the Editor's notebook. After all we have to have something to laugh about while we read what the ed. has to say.

5. Please don't print two letters by the same person in one issue. If you must, save it over, but give someone else a chance.

6. Why don't you have some kind of prizes for the three letters that are voted best for the month by the readers? That way readers will have something to work for and besides that I'll bet you'll get a lot more sparkle in your letters. And more humor too.

RONALD MADDOX,
87 Utica Street,
Hamilton, N. Y.

Well, what do you think of this reader's page? The only time we cut it is when stories run obstinately long, or the ad department goes on a selling spree. Our small size type would be very hard reading if it were set in solid pages, and not very attractive, we think. Also, why not give the advertisers a break? All you have to do is stick

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to inside columns. Only very rarely does this formula break down by an odd ad or two. As for prizes, we tried that. The net result was we got letters written in an attempt to be clever and grab the prize, instead of sincere letters of criticism and discussion.—Ed.

AN AUTHORITY SPEAKS

Sirs:

I just came across Mr. Wilhite's letter in "Discussions" and felt that it should not go unanswered, especially since the editorial opinion seems to put a stamp of approval on Mr. Wilhite's idea.

That idea is, essentially, that Mr. Wilhite wishes to substitute a steady acceleration against the earth's gravitational field for what he calls a "terrific burst of speed" resulting in escape velocity, in the beginning.

This reasoning shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the conception of "escape velocity." Escape velocity is, in the first place, the velocity a body would attain if it fell toward earth from an infinite height. Its impact velocity would then be escape velocity, 11,200 meters or about seven miles per second. This implies, of course, that there is no atmosphere to slow it down—actually the impact velocity of what is left of a 200-pound meteorite is just short of 1000 feet per second, the same as airplane bombs—and that it fell in a straight line which would rarely happen in nature.

Now the rule is that you need as much velocity of departure *for* a given altitude as the impact velocity *from* that altitude. Since any altitude above, say, 250,000 miles may be considered "infinite" it has become customary to say that you need escape velocity for a space ship. But that term is not used primarily to denote 7 miles per second, but to denote the power of the earth's gravitational field. You can make it 11,200 meters at the surface (actually you can't, of course, because of air resistance) or you can make it 10,300 meters at a height of about 100 miles, or less at a greater altitude. You can go "up" to about 50,000 miles any way you want and make it some 2000 meters per second. You can do all that *if* you can carry your fuel for doing it.

I repeat, the figure for the escape velocity represents the gravitational field. . . . But you are best off if you use up your fuel as fast as possible (to save weight) and if you do attain this velocity. Because in that case you carry only "energy," but not too much fuel. Here are some figures to chew on: A one-ton ship which is to go to the moon, land there and return will need (roughly) 135 tons of hydrogen and oxygen for fuels. That is, if the escape velocity is attained quickly. Otherwise you have to *multiply* the fuel needs by a minimum of 450. Note that it is not 450, but a *minimum* of 450.

Anybody else opposed to escape velocity?

WILLY LEY,
415 West 24th St.,
New York, N. Y.

The editors think that we can pretty well abide by what you say. And we thank you immensely for setting us straight on the matter of escape

velocity. Coming from a rocket man who has experimented in rocketry, your opinion is of great weight with us.—ED.

"JEGGA" AN ALL TIME GREAT

Sirs:

I congratulate you. I congratulate David V. Reed. In my opinion "The Empire of Jegga" will rank as one of the all time greats. It was wonderful. Please keep up that standard.

The only discords in an otherwise perfect magazine were the inclusions of a Juggernaut Jones and a John Hale story. Please cannot you eliminate these two unhealthy characters along with Lefty Feep. The liquidation of these three would improve your magazine 500%.

How about an Adam Link story soon?

Has "The New Adam" by Stanley G. Wienbaum ever been completely published unexpurgated by any SF magazine? I know you published it some issues ago, but was it complete?

SHERMAN BROWN, 3RD,
401 So. Lafayette,
Denver 9, Colorado.

Eando Binder assures us he will do another Adam Link story for us. Juggernaut Jones is now in the army, so he'll be missing for awhile. John Hale, also, will be missing, due to pressure of other work on the author. Lefty Feep is very popular with our FANTASTIC ADVENTURES readers, and he will appear a number of times more we're sure. "The New Adam" was published in book form, but is now out of print. It was cut a trifle for the magazine publication, but only certain rather erotic parts were omitted.—ED.

MORE ON ESCAPE VELOCITY

Sirs:

Why all this "escape velocity"?

Assuredly it would be very nice (and infinitely more comfortable than attaining escape velocity) to allow your ship to climb leisurely out from a planet. Unfortunately for us hedonists, and despite Mr. Wilhite's "hog-wash and wasted effort" statement, the space-flight mathematicians knew perfectly well what they were doing and why.

In the first place, a ship floating slowly out could never hope to remain out for long—the fuel giving out, our daring (and foolish, to try this particular stunt) astronauts would return to mother earth, but fast. However, they couldn't get far enough out this way to leave our atmosphere, so they wouldn't be turned into flaming meteorites—this is to set at rest those desiring spectacular deaths Instead, their deaths would be very unspectacular indeed, for it isn't uplifting to the ego to be scraped up with a shovel.

Use more fuel? It sounds good, and would even work—IF enough fuel could be carried. The depressing fact that we can only carry a limited amount of the stuff, even in step-rockets, remains. Even though a ship may carry enough fuel to attain escape velocity, if it does not attain that velocity it is in effect nothing more than a glorified

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sounding rocket which must eventually come down again when the fuel is exhausted.

Here a certain confusion enters the problem. To attain its highest efficiency, the rocket must move forward as fast as its exhaust gases move backward, and the velocity of the gases is only about half that of escape velocity. Therefore it can be seen that fuel is actually used inefficiently in reaching the crucial speed, but is or can be—efficiently used in slower flight which can't take us into space!

Assuming equal fuel-weight ratios, a ship burning its fuel efficiently would reach a higher altitude under power than the other one not so efficient. Here's where the second one becomes a space ship and the first remains just a skyrocket doomed to fizzle out and fall back. The second, although its power has been exhausted sooner, has enough speed to travel on out—and out—and out. But the first, while it reaches a very high altitude, has not at any time escaped gravity.

To clarify escape velocity somewhat, by the way, it has been calculated by astronomers that a body falling from an infinite distance to Earth would (neglecting air resistance, etc.) attain a high speed of about 7.1 miles per second. Consequently it follows that when we can send out a body at that speed (again neglecting air resistance) it will never return to earth. Someday if we get atomic powered rockets we can forget all about escape velocity, but it's going to take some doing before we get those super-fuels.

Lastly, there is not, and never has been (contrary to the wild-eyed Sunday supplement type of article) any "frantic search for a fuel to achieve escape velocity." Ordinary liquid oxygen and any one of several hydro-carbons will do very well, thank you.

KEITH BUCHANAN,
Box 148,
Amsterdam, Ohio.

Well, we seem to have started something, and we're glad to see all these letters on the subject. Each one brings out valuable points—ED.

AN ANSWER TO TERRILL

Sirs:

The main reason for this letter is an item in the September Discussions; a maddening thing by Walter Terrill who for some reason failed to furnish his address. Usually, a letter of this type fails to stir me one way or the other, but when the editor more or less agrees with the thing, then it's time to say something.

The statement that irked me most was this one: "So, to sum up space travel, why?" All I have to say is that Mr. Terrill has about as much common sense and imagination as a dead earthworm. Why did Columbus *bother* to discover America? Why did anyone ever *bother* to explore the wild jungles of Africa? Why not sit home and read detective stories? *Ye Gods!!!*

To take up more concrete things that have nothing to do with personal ideas, let's get down to some of Mr. Terrill's statements. I shall now

squelch his "facts." There is more than one school of thought about the atmosphere of Venus, and by far the majority do not agree with the methane theory. There, according to many authorities, is a Twilight Belt on Mercury that would support life. And in even *any* temperature, Life could evolve according to the conditions on that planet—not life as we know it, true, but life nevertheless.

Spaceships naturally follow the basic cigar design, for reasons that are quite clear to any thinking person—a guy doesn't have to be an aviation expert to know something about air resistance.

In the future, new metals, new minerals, new machines, new types of Life, new civilizations *will* be found—there is no doubt about it. So why not write about them?

There is no more intelligent and fascinating thing written than science fiction. So now *I'll* sum up: Nuts to Mr. Terrill, and nuts to his adolescent ideas! Yes, and a dirty look to the editor, too, for phrasing his reply to Mr. Terrill so that the reader gets the impression that he, and thus the policy of AMAZING STORIES, thinks science fiction is no good.

For "Carbon-Copy Killer" was not a science fiction story!

And, obviously, you do *not* agree with Mr. Terrill—for the type of story printed in AMAZING STORIES certainly is contrary to his ideas.

So much for a letter that made me good and mad.

Although you do not seem to care for listings, here is a brief report on the September AMAZING:

A:

1. "When the Darkness Came."
2. "Lunar Vengeance," by Thornton Ayre. (More!)
3. "Madcap of Mars," by Festus Pragnell.

B:

4. "Luvium, the Invincible City," by A. R. McKenzie.
5. "The Powerful Pipsqueak," by Ross Rocklynne.

C:

6. "The Devil's Planet," by David Wright O'Brien.
7. "War Worker 17," by Frank Patton.

Idle comments: It is a shame to waste the talent of Frank Patton on corn . . . the only thing that saved the O'Brien yarn was the fact that the "surprise" ending, in which the reverend turned out to be a space dick and his daughter his sweetie, was happily absent . . . if the Ayre tale is a sample of what you have grown away from I suggest you grow back in a hurry . . . the Luvium yarn was good, but the confusing mass of slam-bang bloody battles got on my nerves.

CHAD OLIVER,
3956 Ledgewood,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

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State Bureau of Texas	Los Angeles, Calif.
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things in your letter, but not that. As for scientific detective yarns, David V. Reed is finishing one that will knock your eye out—using some of the comments you readers gave us on the carbon-copy story! Thanks for your listing. We still want them, but we don't publish them the way we did —ED.

LIKES SCIENTIFIC MYSTERIES

Sirs:

I have been reading your magazine for the first time and find it to be one of the most interesting of its kind.

I have found in your stories everything that would hold your suspense, but if you could possibly put more Scientific Mysteries in it I think I would enjoy it more. I was very much interested in the article L. Taylor Hansen wrote, "Does the Atlantic Hide a Sunken Land," and the stories "Pop Gun" by F. W. Powell and "Prison in Space" by Henry Norton. These were my favorites in your August issue.

HAROLD NEWMAN,
700 West 180th Street,
New York, N. Y.

Our Scientific Mysteries series will continue for many more months, or rather, we should say, years! Mr. Hansen is an authority and he has supplied us with a vast amount of material.—ED.

HE CORRECTS—AND SO DO WE

Sirs:

For the past several (8-10) years I've been getting the biggest kick imaginable from reading yours and associated fictional science magazines. As a matter of fact it's *almost* exclusively my literary source of entertainment. *But:*

Ever so often my blood (what's left of it since the doctors have been so engrossed in my physical make-up) starts to boil like nobody's business when some of your research department (or whoever it is that stretches its imagination in intra and extra diverse channels and, with their x(?)—69x! imaginations concoct a ship like the one depicted on the back cover of your September, 1943 (Vol. 17 No. 9), issue of AMAZING STORIES. Using your own system of reasoning I'm sending along a rough sketch of what my obviously less overworked (if smaller) mind says a ship would look like using your own statistics (P. 208 "Ship of Jupiter") *must* more reasonably appear like.

Since being an artist is not listed among my various achievements I won't try to show it pictorially but I guess you'll get the idea.

Since the Seas of Jupiter are so viscous, sticky, and heavy it seems obvious that almost anything will float on it—like a bar of aluminum. It would probably react like a log on earth ocean.

To maintain as little surface friction as possible that ship of yours would be built more like a three pontoon affair (see diagram) and its means of traction *definitely* would not be screws such as wildly imagined by you but more aptly tractors such as used on amphibian tanks, etc

These works to be enclosed in a casing so en-

tire works is buoyant—only treads contacting surface of ocean. (Also hull, of course). Then just the treads contact the liquid just as the screws do in your picture.

With the tractor an exceedingly greater pull could be exerted per unit measure of power - namely because it presents more inside surface to harness the power. (Remember your foot-pounds formula?) This way with added leverage made possible—even a ship built here on earth using Earth's sources of mechanical power the oceanic trip could still be accomplished in days rather than months.

I don't know if the diagrams are very clear. (I doubt it) but use your own picture with treads and shield the treads so only the working portion is exposed plus cleaning gears—and presto—you get the idea.

Likewise if the sea is as dense as you say the ship would (in spite of the tremendous weight) still ride rather than plow thru' a wave.

Now *I'm* getting confused. So except for a word of thanks for years of swell reading I'll close now.

PVT. RALPH BLUMENTHAL,
Walter Reed Hospital,
Ward 31 (Ortho) No. 29.

Okay, Ralph. But we still like our screw device. You see, we think it's a waste of energy to lift all that sticky stuff up on top of the ship and all around the top side of the treads, wherever you have them. It wouldn't flow off fast enough, would it? So why not have the driving force remain right down in the sticky stuff, and not have to add to its work by fighting gravity? We didn't reproduce your drawing because your letter is very clear of itself —ED

PRICELESS-EPIC-UNFORGETABLE!

Sirs:

Approximately two years ago I was reading science fiction like a fiend—literally eating it up, and AMAZING STORIES was one of the most important factors. Then suddenly, my "hobby" began to fade hack plots began to seep in among the previous gems of science fiction, and AMAZING started putting out those giant size issues, with nothing but a lot of trash for material. So I quit. Just recently, I was seeking some form of amusement and entertainment for my spare time, and immediately thought of my "first love." I purchased the November issue of A.S. and, with a critical point of view in mind, started reading. Now, before I go any further, let me classify the stories in the November issue, and then take them apart individually

1. Empire of Jegga—Reed.
2. Juggernaut Jones, Pirate—McKenzie.
3. Black Pool Repp.
4. Aura of Death Lewis
5. Jenny, the Flying Ford Arno.
6. Johnny Rainmaker—Yerxa.

Noting that "Empire of Jegga" would require close observation, I tore into the shorts first. To my consternation, only one satisfied me—"Juggernaut Jones, Pirate." The rest were nothing but loose plots with a fantastic background, and I

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wouldn't even want to see them in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES (or has F.A. been discontinued?). And only Fuqua's illustration for McKenzie's yarn was above average.

Then, with a sigh, I started "Empire of Jegga" —and was knocked senseless! My dear editor, in Mr. Reed's novel, you have found one of the most priceless epics of science fiction ever printed! What a change of form! I could say plenty about "Empire of Jegga"—about the never-ceasing element of mystery surrounding it, about the creation of an unforgettable character in Nick Brewster, and other things—but I'll leave it go, and just say that it was a wonderful story! Not only that, but those pics by Hadden were a perfect fit for the story itself.

That's all I have to say, Mr. Editor, and to prove how much I liked that great novel, you can expect my subscription very soon.

Just get rid of the type of story like the last four on my list, and I won't ever worry about the future of science fiction again.

One thing I forgot—let's have a lot more letters in Discussions from now on—what say?

WM. STOLZE, A.S.,
V-12 USNR,
Notre Dame, Indiana.

Never get off a horse while he's still running! Let that be a lesson to you! "Fantastic Adventures" still appears bi-monthly, alternating with AMAZING STORIES.—ED.

A READER AGED 13

Sirs:

I have been reading your mags for over a year. Most people think I have a terrible imagination. I can think up millions of themes for stories. But I hate to write. You are luckier than most people to get this letter. One story I like to think about is a Swiss family Robinson of space. Have them go to Venus, Mars or some place like that. Anybody with just a tiny bit of imagination.

Now to get to your August issues FA-AS. First in AS is "Dr. Varsag's Second Experiment" by Ellis, although it could have ended better and why doesn't Hadley learn to draw? Second in FA is "Chariot of Death" by Wilcox. Third in AS is "A Patriot Never Dies." It makes a nice cover too. Speaking of covers, what's that about on FA? It couldn't be the star shepherd because he's a he. By the way who models for McCauley in "The Stone Goddess of Yunan?" The rest all rate fourth or fooey in other words. A reader aged 13.

JACK COLLINS, (no address.)

No, the girl on the cover was not the star shepherd, but rather the girl oracle. And we don't know who modeled the stone goddess. But aren't you jumping the gun a little?—ED.

CRITICISM

Sirs:

My letter to you is filled with criticism and suggestions. From what I gather that is the object of your discussions.

My first big criticism concerns those who write in to your discussion column suggesting that all or most of your printed stories should meet with only their ideas and their line of thought. Do they ever stop to think that all people don't appreciate their views? I think not. That is one of the many human failings.

In order to clarify my statement, I wish to take as an example Mr. Terrill of the September issue of the AMAZING. He suggested that you should print more stories on the order of the "Carbon-Copy Killer." You will find that two out of three of yours readers disliked "Carbon Copy Killer." To my surprise I find you agreeing with the minority. You also shoved the blame for the lack of such stories on your writers. Surely, Mr. Editor, you must know that it does your business no good to openly bow before one third of your customers. Then again, if you do not approve of the stories your writers turn over to you why print them? Why don't you discard these stories, write stories to suit yourself and your one-third and then sit back and listen to the noise your mag makes when it hits the rocks? Mr. Terrill stated that your interplanetary travel stories were not practical. He all but said that space travel for a number of light years was not possible. Maybe not from the average mind's point of view for the mind is tied close to home. But I say to Mr. Terrill, let him prove that space travel is not possible before he gripes on that type of story and tries to tie science fiction (which by all rights should be advanced) closer to home. As I see it, it is this advancement above the understanding of the average mind which produces interest, baffiement, wonder, and attributes greatly to the success of your magazine. Just keep a variety of types of stories and you will always be well fed. I am young and I like a lot of blood and thunder but I am not as selfish as Mr. Terrill.

Now for my suggestion. I am only seventeen years old. So you see that I have not been reading your stories long. Undoubtedly there have been a great deal of excellent stories before my time and beyond my memory. Therefore I suggest for the benefit of those like myself, that you either bring back one story from the past each month or publish a special magazine for that purpose. I am sure that not only myself but thousands of other readers of AMAZING STORIES would appreciate it.

I hope I haven't offended Mr. Terrill too much in using him for an example. It is not my practice to criticize my superiors but this is one time I could not resist expressing my opinion.

LEE WRIGHT,
12643 Ilene Ave.,
Detroit, Mich.

You base your percentages on the letters we published. Perhaps we leaned over backward in publishing letters that differed with our own opinion. The fact is, we got five letters to one in favor of "Carbon-Copy Killer." The only objectors, strangely, were those who said it wasn't scien-

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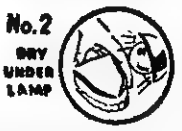

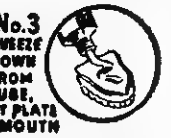

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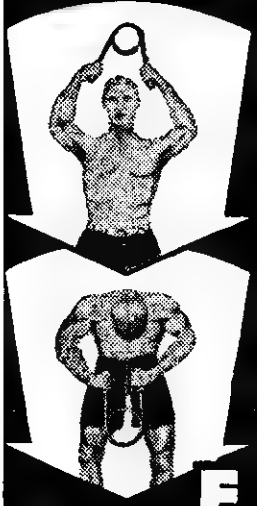

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tific, which we commented upon before. Thus, we actually don't cater to any minority. Published letters are not numerous enough to draw such percentages as you mention.—Ed.

AN ANCIENT LANGUAGE?

Sirs:

Am sending you this in hopes you will insert in an issue to keep it from dying with me. It would arouse a lot of discussion.

Am sending you the language so that some time you can have it looked at by some one in the college or a friend who is a student of antique time. This language seems to me to be definite proof of the Atlantean legend.

A—animal (used 'an' for short)
B—be—to exist (often command as Ban meant "stay away to exist." Same as quarantine)
C—con—to see
D—de—detrimental or rather disintegrant energy (the second most important symbol in language.)
E—energy—an "all" concept including idea of motion
F—fecund (used "fe" as in female)—fecund man
G—generate (used "gen")
H—human (some doubt on this one)
I—self—ego (same as our I)
J—same as generate
K—kinetic (force of motion)
L—Life
M—man
N—child or spore or seed (as ninny)
O—orifice (a source concept)
P—power
Q—quest (as question)
R—ar as horror (a symbol of a dangerous quantity of dis (disintegrating) force in the object.)
S—an important symbol meaning sun (sis)
T—te (the most important symbol used; the real origin of cross symbol—it meant integration force of growth (all matter is growing)—the intake is gravity cause the force is T ("tic" meant science of growth)—remains as credit word.)
U—you
V—vital (used as "vi")—the stuff Mesmer calls animal magnetism
W—will
X—conflict symbol—crossed force lines
Y—why
Z—zero symbol—a quantity of energy of T neutralized by an equal quantity of D

A great number of our English words have come down intact as romantic—ro man tic—"science of man life patterning by control." Trocadero—troc see a dero good one see a bad one—applied now to theatre. This is perhaps the only copy of this language in existence and it represents my work over a long period of years. It is an immensely important find, suggesting the god legends have a base in some wiser race than modern

man, but to understand it takes a good head as it contains multi-thoughts like many puns on the same subject. It is too deep for ordinary man—who thinks it is a mistake. A little study reveals ancient words in English occurring many times. It should be saved and placed in wise hands. I can't, will you? It really has an immense significance and will perhaps put me right in your thoughts again if you will really understand this. I need a little encouragement.

S. SHAVER,
Barto, Penna.

We present this interesting letter concerning an ancient language with no comment, except to say that we applied the letter-meanings to the individual letters of many old root words and proper names and got an amazing "sense" out of them. Perhaps if readers interested were to apply the formula to more of these root words, and let us know the percentage that make sense, we will be able to discover if the formula applies in a greater percentage than is possible by pure chance. Our own hasty check up revealed an amazing result of 90% logical and sensible! Is this really a case of racial memory, and is this formula the basis of one of the most ancient languages on Earth? The mystery intrigues us very much.—ED.

LETTER FROM A DRUMMER

Sirs:

Congratulations. Your November issue was swell (not that they haven't been before), but I felt that I must add my humble opinion to the loud chorus of happy (I hope) readers. Your salient super novel, "Empire of Jegga," was one of the best (and longest) that I have seen grace your pages for some time. It was a little confusing at times, but the facts that David V. Reed added, made the story seem startlingly real.

Your other stories left me cold as the proverbial cucumber, what there was of them. "The Black Pool," by Ed Earl Repp was fair, but wasn't as good as "The Light That Killed" in the March '43 issue.

I am a musician by trade (drummer) and even though I am pretty busy, I always find time for AMAZING STORIES and its sister *Fantastic Adventures*. In fact, my thirteen-year-old sister, who is a Campfire Girl, also reads them.

Do keep up the good work and do your best to please the GUMB Club of which I am unofficially president. (It stands for GIVE US MORE BURROUGHS).

DON MANNING,
3208 E. Pine St.,
Seattle, Wash.

A lot of things will return to us after the war, including Burroughs, now a war correspondent. How about a letter from your sister?—ED.

WHY?

Sirs:

The fact that AMAZING STORIES is to skip an issue and possibly go bi monthly is an appalling one. I have a request to make. Rather than go bi-monthly or begin skipping issues, return to the old pre-1942 size, print the *good* stories such as were featured between 1939 and 1941, and you'll again have one of the best magazines printed. Oh yes—continue to charge 25c and trim the edges. Even if you can't trim them smoothly, at least cut them open! Had to split about half the September number open with a paper knife!

GENE HUNTER,
2232 N. W. Irving,
Portland, 10, Ore.

We've already gone bi-monthly, and trimmed size down by 32 pages. Unless it becomes necessary we hesitate to cut down still further. We believe we can give you more on a bi-monthly scale at large size than we could on our old 1942 scale. We still run 208 pages, plus covers. As for the stories, the only old time author left out of the service is Don Wilcox. The new authors naturally have a new touch to their fiction. But the boys will be back some day . . . Trimmed edges would waste paper already sorely needed. To trim, we'd have to count all that paper in our total tonnage, and it would mean less pages. You don't want that, do you? As for the pages not being cut, this must have been an isolated instance. It happens very rarely, when the cutters skip a section or two.—ED.

NOVELS IN MAMMOTH DETECTIVE, TOO

Sirs:

Does your companion magazine, *Mammoth Detective* feature long novels such as "Empire of Jegga" in your current issue? I like the long story best, and I like Ziff-Davis pulps.

WALTER KETTERING,
1987 Wells Street,
Milwaukee, Wisc.

Absolutely! On the stands now!—ED.

OLD MAIDS' SOCIETY

Sirs:

Your mag has always been my favorite but it seems your mag as well as almost every other mag has in the readers' dept. readers who love to show off and don't do a bit of good by spieling of technical terms of science they looked up in a book and don't know a thing about themselves.

A little time ago you asked for the readers to settle down and write for the benefit of the mag not just as a public "Old Maids' Society" and I agree 100%. A reader when writing to the mag should tell his version of what's right and wrong. But there is no sense in writing to tell merely that they hate the mag, editor, editor's family and all the staff and a foolish few fans.

KENT TIMBERLAKE,
Salem, Nebr.

What do you think of this month's gang? Your editor hopes you readers liked this column as much as we did! Write again, you guys!—ED.

STORIES of the STARS

By MORRIS J. STEELE

Death of the Moon

Here is the possible true story of the end of the Moon civilization and origination of the craters

(See back cover)

ONE of the most interesting things in the night sky has always been Luna, Earth's lone satellite. But perhaps the most interesting feature (beyond the "face" that can be seen with the naked eye) is one we can now see through telescopes, the pocked mass of craters that mars the whole face of the little world.

How did these great craters come? Are they volcanic? Science says no. They are much too large, and much too regular in shape. In experimenting to discover how they were made, interesting results were made by throwing stones into soft mud. The resultant "craters" looked exactly like the craters of the moon, with the little central prominence that most lunar craters have.

So, say scientists, the moon's surface has been bombarded by meteors, which have caused it to look as though it had at one time contracted smallpox.

Here another question comes up. Are these craters caused by meteorites such as those which fall daily on the Earth? Again science says no. For then we would continually note new craters on the moon. Are they, then, caused by meteors such as the one which now rests at the bottom of a crater in Arizona? Again, no. If huge meteorites were as frequent as the surface of the moon would indicate, then Earth, too, would be pockmarked, for not even our blanket of atmosphere could burn up such giants.

There is only one answer. Some time in the dim past, a swarm of meteors, or perhaps the neucleus of a giant comet, collided with the moon, striking it squarely, and destroying it and its civilization. Science tends to the comet theory, since Earth itself escaped the direct storm of missiles, and received only such stray ones as the Arizona meteor, the Siberian meteor (although these two are certainly not a portion of that ancient swarm, but more recent—the Arizona meteor approximately 4,000 years ago; the Siberian at the dawn of the twentieth century) and the Carolina meteor craters. The Carolina craters are incredibly ancient, having been discovered by photographers from a high altitude. Also, there is direct evidence of a belt of meteor storm, or a comet, which grazed the earth and passed on in ancient times (associated by many with the destruction of the Bifrost Bridge of Ancient Asgard [Norse] by the Ragnarok).

Perhaps it was the Ragnarok (the comet) which destroyed the moon civilization, left its face marked with hundreds of giant craters and thousands of smaller ones, and materially changed the face of the earth itself.

Let us picture (as has one of our authors in this issue in a story on exactly this subject) what might have happened on the moon on that long-gone day when doom came.

Lunar astronomers must have seen the comet or meteor swarm coming (Earth ancients of Asgard knew it was coming) and plotted its course so that they knew it would strike the moon squarely. Their science must have been great, because theirs was a much older world (in the sense that it cooled more quickly and thus permitted life much earlier). Knowing, then, that disaster lay ahead, they must have made some attempt to avert it.

Perhaps they built huge machines, employing power so great that we don't even dream of it today, in an attempt to divert the comet, or to swerve their own body from its path. The later task, is, theoretically, an impossible one (the bootstrap rule) and thus they must have concentrated on force rays to throw aside the onrushing menace. In order to divert a stellar body, it is much more feasible to apply an outside force, rather than a force located on the body itself, especially if it is of any size. To make of the moon a giant rocket would have been as fatal as the comet storm, since it might crash into the earth or fall into the sun, once its orbit was disturbed.

The day of destruction must have come with a great battery of force rays trained on the onrushing comet. These rays must have attempted to scatter the huge boulders of the head of the comet.

The sight must have been spectacular. In those days the moon had an atmosphere. But when the comet struck, an inferno of pyrotechnics began. Flame must have roared down from the heavens, and added to this heat must have been that generated by the impact of the giant meteorites. All of Luna's cities were smashed to dust and molten lava. Earthquakes, eruptions, added to the destruction. The very air burned. And the machines diverted only minor portions of the comet, enough to singe and strike the earth on a minor scale. And when the comet passed on, Luna was dead. What air was left seeped away into space forever.

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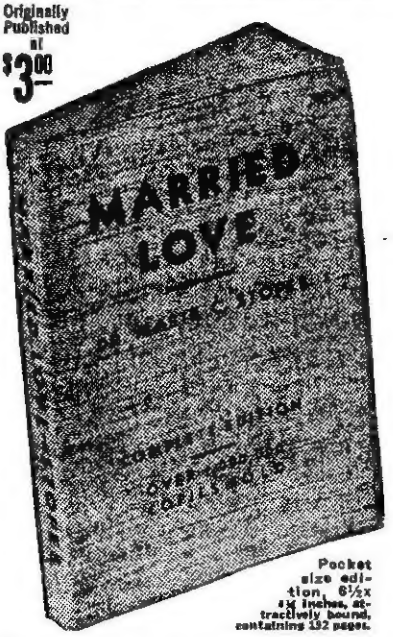

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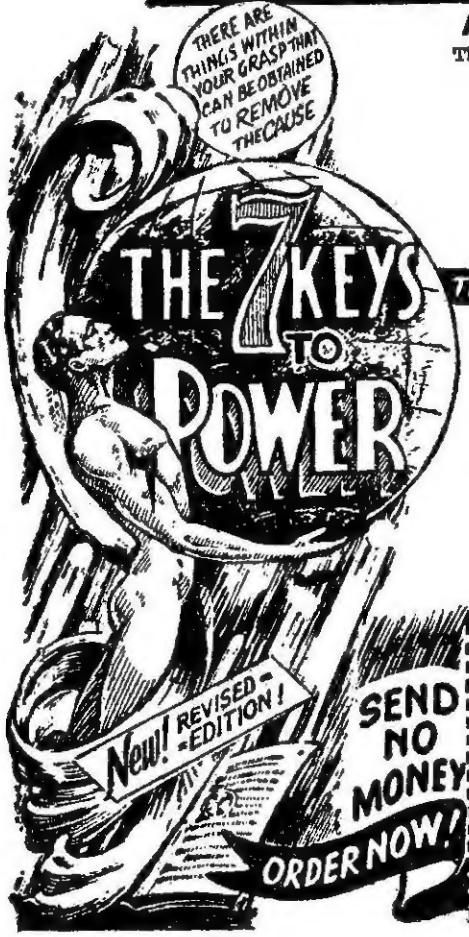
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STORIES OF THE STARS

Pictured here is an imaginary scene from one of the greatest catastrophes of all time, the destruction of the Moon civilization by a meteorite storm

(Complete story on page 208)